

Foreword by Tom Osborne

Touchdown **TOMMIE**



**THE
TOMMIE
FRAZIER
STORY**

With Bob Schaller

Tommie Frazier and his college coach at the University of Nebraska, Tom Osborne, had a unique date with destiny with Frazier directing the Huskers to back-to-back national championships, starting a run of unsurpassed domination in college football history.

"If I were to choose one player who has had the most impact on the outcome of the greatest number of games over the longest period of time since I've been at Nebraska, it would be Tommie Frazier—he's the difference maker," Coach Osborne said. One of the best big-game quarterbacks in the history of college football, Tommie Frazier was poised to once again prove his naysayers wrong by making it in the NFL as a quarterback. But a rare blood-clotting condition dashed Frazier's pro football plans. In fact, the week leading up to the draft was devastating in an even bigger way for Frazier: NU quarterback Brook Berringer died in a plane crash the week of the draft.

In *Touchdown Tommie* Frazier talks about the last time he talked to Brook, which was the day Brook died. Frazier talks about the way teammates were taken aback by his perfectionist ways at first. A very private person of few words, Frazier speaks out for the first time to answer questions people have long asked, including why he chose Nebraska, why he almost left Lincoln during his freshman year, how the team pulled together despite the distractions of the Lawrence Phillips incident to win Coach Osborne's second national championship and what life is like now for the player who helped Nebraska to the "next level."

An up-front and uncensored look at the life of a college athlete, Tommie Frazier does not know what his future holds. Having the opportunity to play in the NFL taken away from him did not make Frazier bitter; rather, he is starting a career, something he knows he would not have done for five to 10 years had he gone to the NFL.

Every cloud has a silver lining. Follow along in *Touchdown Tommie* as Frazier blends an interesting mix of off-the-field and on-the-field stories about triumph and tragedy, from long days in the hospital to his relationship with Tom Osborne, and find out the rest of the story behind one of Nebraska's most intriguing legends, Tommie Frazier.

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JUN 2004

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Bob Schaller, Touchdown Tommie

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Of course, we only had the one game against Tommie Frazier. As most of you remember, it was in the National Championship Game in the Fiesta Bowl. Tommie ran for 199 yards, and was named the game's Offensive Most Valuable Player as Nebraska showed it was clearly the National Champion at the end of the 1995 season.

Tommie was outstanding in this game. There were a lot of reasons for the lopsided, 62-24 loss. Our playing and coaching was not our best, but we just got clobbered by a better team. A lot of people remember Tommie's 75-yard touchdown run, and people talk about how we could not tackle Tommie that day. Well, we couldn't tackle Lawrence Phillips, either. At the same time, it was quite an effort by Nebraska and by Tommie Frazier.

It seemed to me that Tommie was the perfect quarterback to run Coach Tom Osborne's offense. All of the skills that you need to run that offense, you could find in Tommie Frazier. Coach Osborne needed someone who was fast laterally and could think quickly on his feet, making the right decisions in traffic. To me, that was Tommie. The Nebraska offense had a philosophy of run the ball, run the ball and then throw it. It is an offense that requires the quarterback to have certain gifts and abilities. That quarterback for that offense, without a doubt, was Tommie Frazier. Now that Tommie's football career is over, it would be neat to see him get into coaching because he has an obvious feel for the game and a knowledge that could benefit a lot of players.

I know Tommie is a competitive person and coaching could give him the opportunity to satisfy that competitive drive. I have only been able to meet with Tommie a couple of times. Of course, coming out of high school, he was looking for an offense like the one at Nebraska, not the kind we run at Florida. So I don't think he had a real interest in coming to a system like what we run with the Gators. On the other hand, we are very happy to have Tommie's "little" brother, Rod, as a member of the University of Florida football family. Rod started for us last year as a redshirt freshman, and we are expecting nothing but good things from Rod as he continues to grow and learn our system. By having Rod join our

TOUCHDOWN TOMMIE

program, the coaching staff and I at Florida have had the privilege of getting to know the Frazier family. It is a very good family from which Rod and Tommie come. They learned the right values and sense of responsibility early in life from their parents, and they had several brothers and a sister who were able to share in their successes and help them grow as people. Coming from such a strong family only increases a young person's chances of having success in life. I believe Rod and Tommie have that kind of background that will lead them to be successful in life. Now that Tommie's out of football, it sounds like he's got a plan to do something else. Whether it is coaching or business or whatever, as long as you plan and are smart enough to realize that you won't be playing football forever, you will increase your chances for succeeding in the long run, which is the most important thing of all. Playing careers for football players, even those fortunate enough to go on to the NFL, have a finite period, so there is life after football for everyone who ever plays the game. That day comes quickly to a lot of athletes, especially the ones who do not think about it while they are playing. You have to be prepared to make your way in life. Certainly, what Tommie Frazier brought to the football field as an athlete and leader can help him in the business world. His attitude was to get the job done and move forward. That's what the business world is looking for day after day. And, of course, I wish Tommie Frazier nothing but the best of luck in the future.

The one word that I would use to characterize Tommie Frazier is competitor. I believe that Tommie epitomizes that term in most everything that he does and was particularly adept at being a great competitor when he played football here at Nebraska. I believe that Bob Schaller does an excellent job of accurately portraying Tommie's nature, his personality and those things that made him a great player and an outstanding person as well. It was refreshing to see that Bob examined Tommie and his playing career through the eyes of many different people who knew him well, and I believe the result is a very accurate portrayal of not only Tommie, but also the events that occurred here at the University of Nebraska during the years that he played for us. So many books written about people have almost fictional qualities in that the truth is distorted in many ways. This is not the case with what Bob Schaller has done in regard to portraying Tommie.

Tommie was certainly a special person to me in that he had enough trust in me and our coaching staff to travel a long way from home to play in an environment and a culture that was very different from his own.

I found Tommie's observation as well as those of his mother regarding the recruiting process and the overall culture in the Athletic Department here at Nebraska to be interesting. I was gratified to see that they felt that Tommie was cared for as a person and that his best interests were looked after. We made a concerted effort as a coaching staff to treat our players this way, and to have it verified by Tommie and his family was certainly nice to see.

Tommie was the key catalyst in an extraordinary stretch of Nebraska Football history. I am sure that we would not have been as good as we were without him, and he will always be someone that I remember with great affection and respect.

AN ENDING AND NEW BEGINNING

The pain had him doubled over as he tried to sit up in his hospital bed. Tommie Frazier was a world away—both physically and emotionally, from what he had always known. He pushed the buzzer above his bed to call a nurse. But no one in the Montreal hospital came as Tommie Frazier looked out his window on the cold Canadian winter night in September of 1996.

So Frazier pressed the button again. And again. Forty-five minutes passed—as did Frazier's life before his eyes as he wondered what was going on deep within his lungs.

After signing with the Montreal Alouettes of the Canadian Football League following his back-to-back national championship performances as the quarterback for the University of Nebraska, Frazier had a recurrence of the blood-clotting condition in his leg that had hampered him the week before the NFL Draft that spring. His draft stock—he was told he could be drafted as high as the second or third round—plummeted. So he did what he thought was the next best thing, he went north of the border.

But his health spiraled downward like a Hail Mary pass from midfield to the end zone. To this day, Frazier is not sure what caused the pain that hospitalized him after two games in Montreal. One doctor said he had a blood clot in his lung. Another doctor said it was a severe case of pneumonia.

The young quarterback who always had an answer on the playing field was desperately seeking answers on this night. As he lay in pain on the hospital bed waiting for medical attention, Frazier had time to reflect.

Football might be gone from his life. But he would treasure his life like never before, he told God, if he made it through the night.

The nurse finally came into his room. The pain subsided a little, but not enough to leave Frazier completely comfortable, especially emotionally.

So he returned to the state that had embraced him.

"He is a young man who has always been very disciplined in everything," said Turner Gill, quarterback coach for the University of Nebraska who also played in the CFL. "That is very obvious when you look at his football career. But I think it is even more impressive academically because he graduated and received his degree in communications in four years. That says as much about him as anything he accomplished in football, and keep in mind the records and history he made on the field. So the discipline he showed on the field, he also carried off the field and into life."

Tommie's sister claims anything less than a degree in fewer than five years was unacceptable to his family.

"We were pushing for him to graduate in four years," Darcy Frazier said. "He could have done it in three years if he didn't play football. But to do it in four years with what went on his junior year (blood clots) and his senior year (the coming NFL Draft and the recurrence of the blood clots) made his graduation that much more impressive. Education means a lot in this family. If it came down to whether we wanted to see him get drafted into the NFL or to graduate from college, there's no question we thought that graduating was much more important."

Laurie Little, whose husband, Rod, was Frazier's trainer and an assistant high school coach, remains close to Tommie today. She and her family live in Cedar Creek, Nebraska, just outside of Lincoln. Seeing football taken away from Frazier, through no fault of his own, was difficult.

"That was so hard," she said. "You could see the pain inside because he wanted to play football. To have all the talent and desire, but not be able to play because of something your body has done, is hard to deal with. While that was going on, he would still play with our kids and everything, but you could see the pain in his face."

The man who had made a name for himself running through

opposing defenses like a knife through soft butter was about to make another run, away from the football field. His destination? Corporate America.

Kevin Steele, now an assistant coach with the Carolina Panthers in the NFL, was an assistant coach at Nebraska and had recruited Frazier out of Manatee High School in Bradenton, Florida. Like then-Nebraska head football coach Tom Osborne, Steele spoke with Frazier by phone from Frazier's Montreal hospital room.

"I was worried about him, and I had been talking to his mom a lot," Steele said. "He knew that what he had was a serious problem. He had received such great attention and medical care from the Nebraska people—trainers, doctors, the coaches and teammates. In Nebraska when he had the problem with blood clots, he felt like he was part of the process the whole way with the doctors and his coaches. Coach Osborne and the doctors went over every detail with Tommie when he was being treated in Nebraska. It sounded like it was just not that way in Montreal."

Montreal, despite its scenic beauty and diverse culture, had a medical system that was as foreign to Frazier as the French language spoken by many in Canada.

"The health care in Canada is state run," Frazier said. "Up there, you are just a number."

Steele believes Frazier missed the Nebraska culture as much as he missed the outstanding medical treatment.

"The whole thing up there was just different from Lincoln," Steele said. "Nebraska is such a special place because of the people. You can be anywhere, and if you have special people, the place is special. My children even think Nebraska is a special place. I think that's what Tommie missed. The security of the family environment in Lincoln meant a lot to him."

From the time the clots first appeared during Frazier's junior year at the University of Nebraska, he had people who cared for him there at every turn. And he never backed down from the challenge a little known medical anomaly presented him.

"He definitely had the strong support of friends, teammates and

coaches," said former Husker Aaron Davis. "Coach Osborne and Coach Gill were instrumental in keeping Tommie's spirits up. That's when we started talking about the value of prayer and the importance of God, realizing that everything happens for a reason. When Tommie grasped that, he had come to terms with what his health problem meant for his future in football. When you go through something like that—which was, in a sense, a tragedy—you realize that football and athletics are not everything. That was a make or break situation in his life. He had to start looking past football to what he was going to do in his life. You never know when the clots will come back—they'll show up and leave just like that. A pro team does not want to deal with health problems that may recur. Tommie looked at his situation and said, 'So be it.' He took the skills he had learned and honed as a quarterback and applied them to the real world. That kind of mentality is what separates him from a lot of guys. Not that the whole experience with the clots didn't hurt and not that there weren't tears because there were tears and frightening thoughts, but he did look at it face to face."

If Frazier does not get back into football, lifelong friend Tyrone Williams believes his former teammate will make the most of his options in the business world.

"Something I really respect about Tommie is that even though football is over for him, he still has dreams to do other things with his life," Williams said. "That helped me think of life that way too: I mean, I love playing for the Packers and in the NFL, but someday that will all be over. So when I set goals for myself, I don't think just of football. I got that from seeing how well Tommie's handled his life since the situation in Montreal. That's what Tommie is doing: putting football aside and going ahead and doing other things. You can always chase your dreams, whether football is a part of your life or not."

The business world was far removed from what Frazier had known. Yet in other ways it was so similar when it came to work ethic and keeping promises. And Tommie Frazier had no problem on either of those fronts.

Former Husker center Aaron Graham, now with the NFL's Arizona Cardinals, likens Frazier's personality to Bill Gates' and others' who are sharp, but somewhat publicly withdrawn, and claims Frazier will make a big name for himself in the business world.

"I know I am only a 24-year-old man, but I have seen that the most successful people in the business world have the same attitude and mindset as Tommie," Graham said. "It's that go-get-them, completely focused attitude and drive that leads them to excel. There's no question that Tommie is also like that. And with Tommie, you just believe that he can do whatever he sets his mind to."

Graham says Frazier's ingredients for success remain the same, regardless of the endeavor.

"You look at what he did in relation to what he set out to do," Graham said. "He set his goals when he stepped foot in Lincoln. He accomplished almost every single one of them. In order to have that kind of success, people say it takes a lot of luck. You can see that is not true by looking at Tommie because he actually MADE those things happen."

Regardless of the uncertainty as to where he was headed, Tommie Frazier has never forgotten where he came from.

WHERE IT STARTED

Tommie Frazier was in the early years of elementary school when he was first introduced to organized tackle football.

"I was 7 years old," Tommie said. "My older brothers played. Watching them play got me interested."

Had he stuck with his original position of fullback, Tommie Frazier might still have been running for touchdowns in college. But he would've been blocking, too.

"I was not always a quarterback," he said. "I started off as a fullback because I was always bigger than the other kids. And then one day, my coach saw me throw the ball and made me a quarterback. Since that day, at age 7, I was a quarterback."

His mother, Priscilla, thinks it is ironic that it was Tommie's arm, rather than his legs, that got him moved to quarterback.

"When he first started youth league, they thought of him as a fullback or receiver. Then they tried him out at practice, testing the guys out to see what position they should play," Priscilla Frazier said. "They saw he had a strong arm. They told him, 'We'll use you as the quarterback.'"

Frazier was a natural quarterback from almost the first snap.

"He was a quick thinker," Priscilla said. "He knew, right off, how to run plays. It came naturally."

The big plays that college football fans came to associate with Nebraska's No. 15 were not his trademark early on.

"I had no reason to think I was anything special," Tommie said. "I saw myself as just another player, another member of the team trying to win a football game."

A close friend and teammate from the early days and then through Manatee High School and finally the University of

Nebraska was Tyrone Williams, now a defensive back for the Green Bay Packers.

"Tyrone Williams and I played on the same team all those years and in high school," Tommie said. "We grew up together."

Early on, it was not clear which sport Tommie would excel at.

"He was good at all sports—he won a trophy in basketball and went to state in track," Priscilla said. "He was competitive in all the other sports, too. He and his close friend Tyrone Williams played together on all the teams. Both were competitive."

Williams, who played with Frazier at Nebraska before going on to win a Super Bowl ring with the Green Bay Packers, best remembers the competitive side of a young Tommie Frazier.

"When we would lose a game, Tommie would cry," Williams said. "That's how much he loved to win. We were 10 years old. And you think that most 10-year-olds go out there mainly to have fun and that kind of thing. Not Tommie. He only enjoyed it if he was winning. It hurt so bad to lose that it brought him to tears. You could see that drive for excellence even when he was 10."

Another familiar face was the coach; in all the years up until high school, Tommie was coached by a relative.

"Tom Washington, my cousin, was one of my coaches—it seemed like all of my coaches were my cousins," Tommie said.

Since that first year of organized football in the Pop Warner league, Frazier knew football was something that meant a lot to him.

"I have played football every year since then," he said. "And like I said, every year as I moved up, I was coached by a cousin. So it was easy for me to get along with my coaches because I knew that as family members, they would not be too hard on me if I did something wrong."

One of the relatives who did not play a big part in Frazier's football development was his father, Tommie Frazier, Sr.

"My father was not a real football fan," Tommie said. "He did not come to watch me play until my senior year of high school. His first love was baseball. He was supportive. He always asked how we did after each game. But he just did not like football."

Frazier's mother, Priscilla, was there from the opening kickoff, and did not miss many games until Tommie was at Nebraska.

"My mother was at every game—rain, wind, sleet—you name it, she was still there," he said.

"Even though his father didn't really care for football and didn't go to the games, he still knew Tommie was good," Priscilla said. "His friends at work told him that Tommie was good. And he would read it in the paper."

While his father was not at the games, the strong support from his parents helped Tommie choose his direction and find his calling.

"I have a strong mother and a strong father," Frazier said.

While friends got earrings and tattoos, Tommie knew if he got an earring, he would get a tattoo—on his backside from his father.

"I never had an earring," Tommie said. "My father told me that earrings were for girls. I have nothing against my friends having earrings—that is their choice. It is just my choice to not wear one."

The Frazier family has plenty of athletes among the five boys and one girl.

"I have three older brothers and an older sister," Tommie said. "My oldest brother, Carlton, had a partial scholarship to Marion Military Institute for football. I have another older brother named Melvin, who was probably the best athlete of all of us. He was small, but he was a tenacious defensive back and good running back. Freddie was the next child, and then my sister Darcy, me, and my little brother Rod."

Older brother Carlton introduced Tommie to football.

"I am 10 years older, so there was a big size difference when we were younger," Carlton said. "We would be out in our backyard when I was about 17 years old. Guys on our football team gathered in our backyard. Tommie would play with us. He did pretty well. We'd get mad at him and not let him play, and he'd cry in the house to Mom. He held his own. Back then we thought he was a crybaby. He proved us wrong."

The youthful Tommie Frazier nurtured not just his skills, but also his disdain for losing, according to his sister.

"Ooooooooooooooh, he HATED losing," Darcy said. "He was a sore loser. It really got to him. He really did hate it."

His sister said the teams Tommie played on were simply different when her brother was in the lineup.

"Even back in those days, he was determined to be the best he could be," Darcy said. "He made the other players on the team strive to be the best they could be."

Carlton always made Tommie prove himself.

Carlton's nickname is Pike. Tommie said, "He is the 'mean' one, so to speak, a really tough guy. Carlton used to take me to play basketball with him. He taught me the game of basketball and the game of football."

Tommie learned a lot from his older brother Freddie, as well.

"Freddie was the kind who was more of a follower," Tommie said. "As I got older, like in high school, I would always go spend the weekend with Freddie and hang out with him. Out of my three older brothers, I am closer to Freddie than the other two. Freddie was a good baseball player. He would do anything to play baseball. He plays softball now. His dream was to play baseball."

Joe Kinnan, Tommie's coach at Manatee High School has also coached all four of Tommie's brothers.

"Tommie's oldest brother, Carlton, was a starting strong safety when he was a senior," Kinnan said. "Some of Tommie's older brothers played, too, but never on the varsity."

Older sister Darcy also showed athletic prowess.

"Darcy was a good athlete," Tommie said. "But she saw sports as a tomboy kind of thing. She did run track and was real fast. But the older she got, the more she began to shy away from sports."

Younger brother Rod is also quite a football player and now plays for the University of Florida.

"Rod is quiet," Tommie said. "He likes to be by himself. He is the one who is most like me. He has started to open up more since he got to the University of Florida."

Ironically, Nebraska recruited Rod. But Tommie pushed Rod away from Lincoln.

"When Rod was looking at colleges, I told him not to really consider Nebraska," Tommie said. "I thought he would do better at another school. He is a fullback. I told him that at Nebraska, it is more of a position where they recruit in-state players, and then they grow into the position. The University of Florida was a good fit for him. And I did not want him to come here and have everyone expect him to do what I did—to have to live up to what I accomplished. I remember Terry Rodgers came to Nebraska after his father, Johnny Rodgers, had done so well. He had a lot to live up to. Everyone expected Terry to live up to his dad's reputation. Terry was injured a lot, and it was hard for him."

Kinnan said Rod did not get the attention from recruiters that Tommie did.

"Florida is the only school that offered Rod a chance," Kinnan said. "I have a good rapport with the Florida coaching staff."

Even Tommie's mother thought the Gators were a better fit for Rod than the Huskers.

"He resented people always comparing him to Tommie," Priscilla said of Rod. "They had him tagged as Tommie's little brother. He had to go on TV once, and the TV interviewer kept calling him 'Tommie Frazier's little brother.' Rod said, 'I'm Rod Frazier.' You can't expect him to do what Tommie did. As the quarterback, Tommie had his hands on the ball every play. They play two different positions. There was a time when coaches tried to get Rod to play quarterback. But he didn't want to because he felt like he would be compared to Tommie even more. Rod really wanted to play defensive line. But at Florida, they felt he could play fullback."

Rod said the decision to go to Florida was a good one.

"This was the right choice for me," Rod said. "Tommie always said to make whatever decision would make me happy, but to finish whatever I start. I'm proud of Tommie. He is a legend in college football, and he deserves that status. But I also saw some of the things he had to go through, and in some aspects, I didn't envy all of that very much."

While Rod may never match Tommie's feats—and won't be in a position to, making the point moot—he claims to have gotten the best of Tommie several times at home.

"He probably won't find this funny," Rod said, clearly reveling in the humor of it, "but Darcy and I teamed up against him when we'd fight. We always came out on top."

But Priscilla notes with a smile that Rod's decision to stay close by and go to the University of Florida has its drawbacks.

"He wouldn't be running home like this—Tommie couldn't come home when he was homesick in Lincoln because it was so far away," Priscilla said. "Rod's a two-and-a-half hour drive from home."

Tommie said the family children were basically two "teams."

"In our house, we were broken down into sets of three—my three older brothers, and then my sister, me and my younger brother," Tommie said. "It was mostly because of the age difference."

Tommie's father is the quiet one while his mother is more outspoken.

"My father worked a lot," Tommie said. "He was the kind who sat back and observed. He was not prone to make a comment right away. My mother, however, would deliver the message the moment she did not like something. My father was far less outspoken."

Still, Tommie drew a lot of strength from both of his parents.

"I am very close to both my mother and father," Tommie said. "My father is a foreman at a packing company, a fruit and vegetable plant. My mother works in the school system. But she worked at a school across town, different from the one I went to. My mother never had to get on me about my school work because I always got it done."

Words from his mother would later help him in both college football and corporate America.

"My mother taught me to treat everyone the way I wanted to be treated," Tommie said. "She taught me that it was all right to disagree with people, but to be tactful about it and not to pick a needless argument. Treat people with the respect you want. She also told me to respect my elders."

Priscilla Frazier made it a point to encourage her children to make their own decisions.

"She encouraged me to make my own decision when I was choosing a college," Tommie said. "I had a strong mother figure. She also let us make our own decisions and told us we would be responsible for the consequences. When she needed to put her foot down, she did, but she never put it down so hard that we were afraid to make our decisions. She tried to guide us in the right direction, but it was always clear that the choice was ours."

But Tommie said it is important to note that the work ethic that drove him to the status as arguably the best big-game quarterback in college football history came from both his mother and father.

"I get my work ethic from both of my parents," Tommie said. "I learned from my father that you don't have to be the biggest, the strongest and smartest to get things done. As long as you are honest and hard working, you will be successful. My parents told me that times would be hard, but to always stay focused and concentrate on your goals. They said, 'If football isn't there, you have a good mind to get you by.'"

That led to an unspoken rule about schoolwork—it always came first.

"I was the type of mom who said education comes first," Priscilla said. "Football is a pleasure. If you don't get education and grades, you don't play. That's how my mom brought me up. As I grew up, I knew education was important. I wanted my kids to go further than I went."

With so many kids, there were no dull moments in the Frazier household.

"We had a very busy household," Tommie said. "There were always three or four of us there at any one time. It was always entertaining. We always had dogs. The dog they got for me was named Bobo. It was a mutt—mixed with something—but he was a mutt. But he was the baddest mutt on the block."

While football was his first love, Tommie also developed a passion for other sports.

"I also played basketball and baseball," Tommie said. "I don't know how good I was at baseball. It was just something I did not focus on that much. Basketball was also just another hobby."

Sports were important not only for the competition, but for providing something to do during free time.

"Sports were something for me to do after school instead of hanging out on the streets," Tommie said. "It was something where I just wanted to stay on the right path, and if that meant playing sports when I got bored, so be it."

Williams said he and Frazier knew early on that sports were a good vehicle to avoid the pitfalls many of their friends fell victim to.

"Tommie and I have come a long way," Williams said. "We grew up in Palmetto—and even though it's in Florida, it's no Disney World. Associating with the wrong people, would come up and bite you on the butt if you weren't careful. Sports kept us pretty busy."

Rod Little now lives near Lincoln, and remains close to Frazier.

"When I first went to Florida, Tommie and Tyrone Williams were in junior high," Little said. "They were introduced to me because they wanted to be ballboys for Manatee High School's football team. They started out as ballboys and were kind of managers for the high school team."

Little recognized Tommie's unique characteristics right away.

"Competitiveness, quick-wit, an instant recognition and recall," Little said. "A couple of the varsity coaches and I were sitting in the bleachers at a junior varsity game one day. Tommie called a timeout because he recognized something that he needed to discuss with his coach. Even a college quarterback would not have recognized what Tommie did. In fact, only a couple of the coaches I was with at the time recognized what Tommie saw right away. He just had an uncanny ability and always a strong presence of mind."

By the time Frazier arrived at Manatee High School, a strong tradition was already in place.

"When I got to high school, our football team had won state two of the past seven years," Tommie said. "So they had a very good tradition. The coach there had once coached Division I, at Western

Kentucky, before he came to my high school. My oldest brother, Carlton, was a senior during Coach Kinnan's first year."

Kinnan had a big influence on Tommie.

"I had a lot of interaction with my coach," Tommie said. "He was the kind of person you could really talk to, no matter if things were going good or bad. Coaches like that are easy to play for and easy to get along with."

Manatee High School football coach Joe Kinnan, who was well aware of Frazier, knew he had a budding superstar on the rise. At the same time, with an entrenched starter on a highly successful team, there would be a delay before Frazier's star could rise.

"In 1988, when Tommie was a freshman in high school, he still played youth league football," Kinnan said. "In 1989, Tommie was a sophomore. But our quarterback at the time, who went on to play at Appalachian State, had started for two years. So we had a returning starter who had taken us to the playoffs. Still, we knew that Tommie was a very talented football player. He played junior varsity. Had we not had that kid already locked up as the starter, Tommie would have been our starting quarterback. And this was a solid team—we were No. 3 in the nation in the preseason poll that year. So after Tommie played junior varsity that year, he came up to the varsity once their season ended. We moved our back up quarterback to another position and immediately Tommie was the No. 2 quarterback."

Tyrone Williams was a backup varsity halfback and a starter on the junior varsity with Frazier that season.

"Right away, even growing up together, he stood out on any team he was on," Williams said. "He always had a super strong arm, and he was always breaking tackles for long runs."

Kinnan said Frazier and Williams made for an impressive team, one that could have fared well against several varsity teams in the state.

"That was a phenomenal junior varsity team," Kinnan said. "Tommie ended up playing quite a bit his sophomore year in varsity games because we were awfully good, and we would pull the starters

when we got too far ahead of other teams—we were awfully good. So Tommie, with the seven games of junior varsity, ended up playing in 14 games that year and got a whole season under his belt.”

That experience on the varsity, with all that talent around him, helped Frazier develop quickly, according to Kinnan.

“We were a great football team his sophomore year,” Kinnan said. “We were 13-1, and we lost one game in the middle of the year that was not up to par for us. Still, I felt we could have beaten anyone else in the nation. We had players who signed with Florida, Florida State, Murray State and Princeton.”

That junior year was predicted to be a rough one for Manatee, which had lost 21 of 22 starters from the state champion team.

“Nobody was expecting much from our team coming back for Tommie’s junior year,” Kinnan said. “But we had Tommie at quarterback and Williams at halfback. We were 10-0 and ended up 12-1 after losing to Fort Walton Beach-Chochahatchee, the eventual state champ. We were small in the offensive line—two players were around 190 pounds. Losing to Fort Walton Beach Chochahatchee was tough. We had a lot of kids get hurt the week before, and we were not as strong going into that game as we had been a week or two weeks before.”

Heading into Frazier’s final year of high school football, the team was still in a stage of rebuilding.

“His senior year, really and truly, we did not have a good enough supporting cast around him,” Kinnan said. “We were very inexperienced in the offensive line. We played Riverview High School. Tyrone got hurt, and Shevin Wiggins, who went on to Nebraska, was the backup running back. Shevin fumbled a couple of times, and it just killed us—it wasn’t Shevin’s fault; he just was not ready for that. However, we won the next nine games and beat Bradenton South, 40-0, in the last regular season game. But we lost to Riverview again, this time in the first round of the playoffs by six points.”

Tommie’s mother knew that other teams were keying on her son. Hearing the other teams talking about “getting the quarterback”

started to bother Priscilla more in high school as the players got bigger and faster.

"It was hard," Priscilla said. "I was thinking, 'They had better not hurt my baby.' It was heartbreaking to see everyone gunning for him, sometimes trying to hurt him to stop him. He was the team himself at times, especially when Tyrone was hurt. When he was playing in youth leagues, all the other teams would be talking about was, 'Get that quarterback!'—meaning Tommie. But from that first game on, watching Tommie play has been a big enjoyment. The whole way, it's still nothing but good memories, just a pleasure to see him play."

When Frazier hurt his knee during his senior year, he was fitted for a brace. But it slowed him down, and he didn't want to wear it.

"He messed his knee up his senior year of high school and had to wear a brace when he played," Priscilla said. "It was a special kind of brace, the kind that the pros use. It was specially made for him. I'll never forget the game he had it on. We were playing at Bloomingdale, so we were the visiting team. Tommie was trying to run with it on. He didn't like the way it felt, so he took it off. Coach Kinnan said, 'Tommie, keep it on or sit on the bench. If you take it off, you don't go back in.'"

"Tommie had a strong will," Kinnan said. "He didn't lose at many things in life, even when it came to a battle of the wills."

Kinnan won that battle, as Frazier wore the brace. And Tommie won the game.

"We had quite a few things like that," Tommie said with a laugh. Kinnan knew Tommie was close to his special teams coach/trainer at Manatee, Rod Little, so Kinnan called Little.

"Joe would call, and say, 'What am I going to do with him?' " Rod recalls. "I said, 'Coach, you've been at it longer than I have.' "

Tommie's mother was glad Kinnan won the battle over the wounded knee.

"I kept thinking, 'How can he play in something like that?' It was so bulky," Priscilla said. "But he did keep it on—he didn't have a choice because they taped it on so he couldn't take it off without help from the trainers."

The brace still holds a special memory—and its own place—for Priscilla.

"I still have the brace in the closet," she said.

The player who succeeded Frazier as Manatee's signal caller inherited a strong team.

"We had Willie Taggart at quarterback the year after Tommie left," Kinnan said. "We called him 'Baby Frazier' because he was a very elusive runner, like Tommie. He didn't have the size of Tommie nor did he have the strong arm that Tommie had. But he went to Western Kentucky for college and was very good—he rushed and passed for more than 1,000 yards each year during his four-year college career."

While Frazier had plenty of success, he learned early that he would not be the difference between winning and losing games.

"You can't be individualistic in football," Tommie said. "It is a team sport, and you are depending on the other 10 guys on the field with you at any time. If any one of them breaks down and misses their assignment or doesn't execute their responsibilities, the play might not work, no matter how good the quarterback or running backs are."

Frazier was also solid in the classroom, something Kinnan credits Frazier's parents for.

"My wife taught Tommie in 10th grade English, and said Tommie always did his homework and was always prepared," Kinnan said.

The wins were far more plentiful. But the losses are what Tommie remembers the most.

"I remember the losses more than I do the wins because the games were always so close and competitive," he said. "Even when we lost that year in the semifinals to Fort Walton Beach, they beat us 45-21, the game was still close until the end, and the score wasn't indicative of the game at all. We really did have our chances. Going from central Florida to the Panhandle was an adjustment for our team because it was so cold. I also look back on that game because it was the first time I remember a team intimidating us. It was so

cold, but they came out in tank tops and shorts. That got our attention. We had on long johns and long-sleeve shirts. We were still in the game, and the score was 14-14 at halftime. But we lost Tyrone Williams, our top running back to a sprained ankle. We couldn't run the option very well because we had a freshman replace Tyrone at halftime. Tyrone was a really good running back. He could have been a running back in college somewhere."

Football was not Frazier's only varsity letter in high school.

"I also played basketball and baseball in high school," he said. "Both sports went very well. We had a really good team my sophomore year. My junior and senior year, the interest in our basketball team died down because we weren't very good. We didn't have a true center, and we were playing teams that had 6-foot-10 and 6-foot-9 centers. We had one guy who was 6-foot-6, and that was it. I had some success in basketball. But, again, it wasn't something I was focusing on. Basketball just kept me off the street. I had no long-term goals when it came to basketball."

While basketball and baseball provided something for Frazier to do, it was obvious he would do neither at the next level—in college.

"It became apparent pretty early that I was going to play college football," Frazier said.

During his high school years, Frazier played against a lot of players who would find their way to major college football and the NFL.

"I played against (Kansas City Chiefs receiver) Tamarick Vanover—we played on the same all-star team," Frazier said. "Warren Sapp played for another team that we played. Derrick Brooks played for Pensacola-Washington, and Ray Lewis played for Lakeland-Kathleen. James Stewart, who went on to play against us when he was at the University of Miami, also was on a team we played against."

EARLY LIST OF CHOICES

It started. Tommie Frazier does not know exactly when. But when the floodgates opened for college recruiters, the volume of mail quickly took on a life of its own.

"I have no idea who the first letter came from," Tommie said. "My mother was handling all that stuff early on—the mail, the phone calls, that kind of thing."

Ironically, the fact that Florida State did not make a big run at Frazier had little to do with Frazier and a lot to do with perception.

"In 1983, the pre-Charlie Ward era, we had a kid, Tracy Sanders, who was a quarterback that went to Florida State," Kinnan said. "There was a question whether Florida State would ever play a black quarterback. I don't know if that was a legitimate question, but that's what players believed. Tracy went there and got moved to defensive back. He did well—he started at cornerback opposite Deion Sanders. Plus, when Tracy went there, they had just dropped the option offense."

Still, there were so many schools Tommie had a hard time picking out the schools in which he had a serious interest.

"It took me a long time to make a short list—I didn't even give serious thought to having a short list until I was a senior," he said. "A lot depends on how you avoid injuries and how well you do. So I did not want to exclude any schools."

The Fighting Irish stationery quickly became familiar in the Frazier household, as did the Huskers.

"Notre Dame was one of the first schools to contact me," Frazier said. "Nebraska did, too. I talked to Coach Osborne and Kevin Steele, who was one of Nebraska's top assistant coaches before he went to the NFL and the Carolina Panthers."

Steele made the first visit to Manatee.

"I had been told, 'There's a perfect quarterback for Nebraska at Manatee High School,'" Steele said. "The first time I saw him at the school—I remember the day...I remember like it was yesterday. It was hot and humid. He came out of the locker room and was going toward the field. He had just gotten dressed. You could just see by the way he was carrying himself, guys walking with him—or behind him, which always seemed to be the case. You could just see from the start of warmups that this guy was special. I knew he was a special player and quarterback, not just for Nebraska, but for anyone."

Basically, Steele saw that Nebraska might be rated last by Frazier—at least initially—in just about every area not related to football. However, Steele believed by educating Tommie and his family, the tables could be turned.

"I knew what we were up against early," said Steele, "because the first thing Coach Kinnan said to me was, 'You won't get Tommie. He won't go to Nebraska. He's the perfect quarterback for you all, but he won't go there.' I was like, 'Why?'"

While the news did not exactly brighten Steele's day, it was something Steele heard often when he ventured into warmer climates in search of recruits.

"I was not shocked by what coach Kinnan said to me because we heard that a lot as a staff," Steele said. "You just don't worry. I remember when Coach Kinnan said that because he threw in a detail which would end up being the most important part of the recruiting process: Coach Kinnan said, 'It's not that Tommie's parents will make the decision, but Tommie will very much involve them in the process. They will make him make his own decision, but they will make sure he does all his homework on every school. But like I said, I really don't see him going that far away to college.'"

Had Steele not known of Frazier's solid upbringing and close-knit family, he might not have ended up signing Frazier.

"That day, in telling me we wouldn't get him, Coach Kinnan gave me information that would end up sealing our signing of

Tommie," Steele said. "Because football-wise, I knew we could appeal to Tommie. He would be able to compete for the national championship every year, and to a kid like that, it is a big part of the decision-making process. That's not hindsight, that's what I conveyed to him—and to all recruits—right away."

Steele also knew he had another ace up his sleeve—head coach Tom Osborne.

"I knew the only way to win this family over, and avoid the distance factor and the bad-weather factor, was to get Tommie and his parents to know Tom Osborne," Steele said. "In my heart, I know that Tom Osborne is the finest human being ever to be a head football coach."

Another factor was the kind of people Frazier would find in Nebraska. In Frazier, Steele saw someone committed to hard work. Someone who wanted to win. Someone who could deal with being different, but fitting in when a common destination is the goal.

"The people in Lincoln, and in all of Nebraska, are just good people," Steele said. "Notre Dame, Colorado, Syracuse, Clemson and Nebraska all have big stadiums, nice training tables, good weight programs and solid academics—to be honest, all colleges have all that. I told Tommie, 'If you are warm in your heart toward Nebraska, you can buy a coat. But if you are cold in your heart, a coat won't keep you warm.'"

Back when Steele was recruiting Frazier, NCAA rules on visits were even more strict than they are today.

"You could see the student-athlete only three times," Steele said. "That is an absurd rule because it is hard to get to know someone meeting with them only three times."

Noticing the constant presence of other coaches at Frazier's house and hearing about the mailbags full of correspondence, Steele knew the battle was going to be a long one. However, Steele said Priscilla said something that put him somewhat at ease.

"His mother had indicated to me not so much what he wanted to do, but it was something that helped me relax," Steele said. "She told me, 'Don't worry, we will take care of it.' Now, I didn't know

what it meant—I know what I wanted it to mean, but I wasn't sure. Still, I could tell she trusted Coach Osborne and me, and I knew that was very important to them."

What Steele lacked in quantity in terms of visits, he made up for with quality. And even when it came to quantity of the three one-day allotments, Steele made sure he beat the early birds to the worm and then stayed until Cinderella's deadline—midnight—making use of the full day.

"I stayed all day," Steele said. "I saw Tommie in the morning, during his break, before lunch, at his mom's house at noon, and then I stayed until almost 11:30 p.m."

At the same time, Steele tried to stay out of Tommie's way, even encouraging Tommie to go about his day when Steele was in the Frazier house meeting with Tommie's parents.

"We didn't bother Tommie," Steele said. "We said what we had to say, asked how he was doing and that was it. I think he felt a sense of, 'That program really does care about me.' We had no hour-long phone calls with him. During one of the home visits, I told him, 'Tommie, we need to talk to your folks. You've heard most everything I have to say, go ahead and get out of here and relax.' I think Tommie liked that."

Steele's biggest selling point—the people of Nebraska—ended up being the difference.

"What turned out to be Tommie's most important piece of the puzzle and the biggest truth of all, was people truly do make places," Steele said. "There really are no finer people than Tom Osborne and the staff at Nebraska, and the people of that state. Tommie felt that instantly."

"Tommie is a loner, but it is not like he does not like people," Steele said.

Nebraska coach Tom Osborne did not have the best first visit to Frazier's house in Florida.

"I remember when I first met Coach Osborne—Nebraska had just lost the night before in the Orange Bowl," Tommie said. "Coach Kevin Steele did most of the talking. Coach Osborne was just so

quiet. You could see that Coach Osborne was really down from that game. My father came home, and he walked in and saw Coach Osborne. 'Hey, you were on TV last night—I saw you,' my father said. 'You got your butts whipped. What happened?' Coach Osborne said, 'They handed it to us. It was not a very good performance by us.'

Priscilla quickly encouraged her husband to leave the room.

"I was so embarrassed," she said with a laugh.

"When Coach Osborne first got here that day, he was just so quiet," Priscilla said. "And then when he talked, he spoke so slowly and mellow. He didn't come here with all that fast-talking stuff, trying to sell us something. Tommie was raised in a God-loving household, and since Coach Osborne was obviously a Christian, that was right down Tommie's alley."

Tommie said his mother calmed the situation down.

"My mother was able to get Coach Osborne to relax a little bit," he said. "I always had her there when coaches visited because she was so good at breaking the ice. She looked at Coach Osborne, like, 'Do you talk?' And Coach loosened up. She asked him a lot of questions, and Coach Osborne really relaxed after that. I thought he would be much more talkative. But he was real quiet to start the visit off. It was like he was really tired from the big bowl week. If I had based my decision on what school to pick on that visit, I would not have come to Nebraska."

Even though Osborne was quiet, Steele explained that was how Osborne usually was when they visited with recruits.

"Coach Osborne was tired," Steele said. "But the thing that Coach always brought to the table was the class, the godliness and the gentlemanly aura."

Steele said his main goal was making sure that the Fraziers understood Nebraska's solid infrastructure, which promotes the complete development for student-athletes and offers support in all areas of academic, personal and athletic development.

"I think going out there, I was a little bit uptight because I wanted to make sure I got everything done to convey to the Fraziers

that we at Nebraska have, academically, athletically and socially, a combination of people that Tommie would not find anywhere else," Steele said. "I don't remember that being a make-or-break visit. It was just simply another piece of the puzzle."

The lack of knowledge recruits and their families—including the Fraziers—have about the state of Nebraska is half the battle, Steele said. The state is perceived as a giant cornfield, especially to people in the extreme south, north, east and west of the country, and really in any state outside of the Heartland.

"To be honest with you, when you go from Lincoln, Nebraska, into an area like Florida, you have to overcome some things," Steele said. "It doesn't matter if it's the other coaches at Nebraska—Ron Brown, George Darlington, Frank Solich—people have a perception that there's nothing in Lincoln, Nebraska."

"It was funny, because you could see right away that Coach Osborne and Tommie got along so well," Priscilla said. "They can sit in a room for a long time without saying anything, just smiling at each other. I just loved Coach Osborne. He said, 'Tommie's happiness comes first.' I said, 'Coach, I don't want him to go out there and feel all lonely, since he will be by himself for the first time far away from home.' Coach Osborne said, 'He will be cared for.' From day one, Coach Osborne treated Tommie like he was part of his family."

Despite the rocky first visit the night after the Orange Bowl, Priscilla said she felt a bond with Steele and Osborne right away.

"I can sit and read a person and decide what kind of person they are," Priscilla said. "If they are just trying to sell you something, you can sense there's no sincerity, and that their words are not coming from their heart. When I talked to the coaches from Nebraska and Clemson, those were the two schools I was hooked on. I told all the coaches right from the start, 'I know you will tell my kid one thing to get him to your school, and then you'll tell him something else once he gets there. Once that happens, he will be unhappy, and so will I. And when I'm unhappy, Coach, you will be unhappy, too. You are not going to mess up my child's life and his future.'"

Osborne liked the way Frazier's mother asked questions at every step of the process.

"I felt Tommie's mother would be pretty important. His father was a hard-working guy and a good father," Osborne said. "He didn't seem to be as interested in the recruiting process—Tommie's mother was more tuned into that part of it. During the recruiting process, it seemed like Tommie really listened to his mother, and she listened to him."

All that Steele, Osborne and Tommie's mother talked about at first was school.

"The main thing I wanted was for Tommie to get an education," Priscilla said. "Football is second. He left here to get an education. He plays football as a sport, which is completely secondary to the education, because I want him to get his degree. I could see in their eyes that the coaches from Clemson and Nebraska agreed. Working in Clemson's favor is that it is in South Carolina, which is close to home. To get to Nebraska, I would have to fly."

The other coach who had an excellent shot at signing Frazier was a deeply religious man who coached at Air Force and Arkansas before coming to the South Carolina school of Clemson.

"Ken Hatfield of Clemson was another one of the coaches who made a big first impression," Tommie said. "Paul Pasqualoni, Syracuse's coach, was also in the race early. Bill McCartney of Colorado also called, and so did a lot of schools from the West Coast."

The constant attention was welcomed right off the bat. But very soon thereafter, the fun of the process left for Tommie.

"At first, it was exciting, all the letters and mail," Tommie said. "But then my senior year came, and it started becoming a nuisance. We had coaches calling our house at all hours of the day and night. Because of the time change on the West Coast, the phone would sometimes ring around midnight. It got to a point where I stopped staying home in the evenings. I would go to my girlfriend's house to study and watch TV in the evening, and then just go home when it was time to sleep. I would go home and, my mother would have a

stack of messages. She was getting sick of it because she felt like she was my secretary."

His mother remembers that time.

"Getting that much mail was almost embarrassing," Priscilla said. "He was getting pamphlets from all over."

Still, the time had come for Tommie to begin narrowing the list of schools down to at least a manageable number.

"I did get a short list when my senior year came around," Tommie said. "But I didn't have an order or anything. In order, I visited Notre Dame, Colorado, Syracuse, Clemson and Nebraska."

Priscilla started to breathe a sigh of relief when the deadline came for Tommie to pick the five schools he would visit.

"He said he was going to visit these five schools to see what suited him best, in terms of the community and education," Priscilla said.

Clemson: "They ran the same style offense that I ran in high school. I got along well with the coaches," Frazier said. "They really impressed me. The school is not far from my home, so I could drive there. It was not a huge city, just a college town. The people there were really friendly and sincere. The tradition there was strong."

Syracuse: "They ran the same style offense," Frazier said. "Coach Pasqualoni was different from all the other coaches. Put it this way—he was a New Yorker, and he really tried to sell the school. That program was really riding the upswing at that time, but they still had Marvin Graves at quarterback, and it was clear he would be their quarterback for a while. I had a good visit there. It was cold—a lot of snow—but the guys showed me a good time. We had a snowball fight and a lot of fun. That was the first year Miami was in the Big East, so we went to a Syracuse-Miami basketball game."

While Tommie told his family he had fun at Syracuse, his mother could tell the Orangemen were no longer in the running.

"He loved the big towns like Syracuse—but just to visit, because those towns were too big for him to live in. He's a homebody, and too much of a big city didn't suit him."

Notre Dame: "From what Lou Holtz was telling me, they

wanted to run the same kind of offense that they ran when Tony Rice was there—the option,” Frazier said. “Holtz wanted to re-implement the option. They had been successful with the option offense, but they had gotten away from it. But Holtz said they were committed to going back to it.”

Kinnan was not even sure Frazier would consider other schools after visiting South Bend, Indiana.

“I really thought he was leaning toward Notre Dame, but he had one visit left,” Kinnan said.

While Kinnan sensed the Irish were at the front of the pack, Tommie’s mother had an altogether different perception.

“He went to Notre Dame—he was very interested,” Priscilla said. “But then when he saw how the guys were off campus, partying and drinking; that turned him off a little because he wasn’t that kind of kid.”

Colorado: “I really liked Colorado for a while,” Tommie said. “They were running the option at the time, the same as I had run in high school. But they fell off the list one day when they called and said they had signed Koy Detmer. They said they didn’t want me as a quarterback anymore. But they did want me as a defensive back. So they fell off the list right then and there. Les Steckel, the offensive coordinator at the time, was a good guy, and I really wanted to play for him. He really wanted me there. But it wasn’t his decision to switch the offense to a passing attack. It was Coach McCartney’s. In 1996, I ended up seeing Coach Steckel at the (NFL) Combine—he had joined the NFL by that time—and he said he wished they would not have switched the offense and would have signed me. Les and I got along real well. It was just one of those decisions—one of those things that happened. Had they kept the same offense at CU, I might have signed there. Obviously, there’s no guarantee I would have, but they would have been in the running had they not signed Koy and chosen to switch offenses. But there was definitely a good chance I would have gone there.”

His mother also believed Colorado had been her son’s top choice to that point.

"Colorado is where he really wanted to go," Priscilla said. "When he went out there, they tried to get him to commit. But he had two more visits to make. He said he wanted to give all the schools a chance because he promised he would visit all the schools before he'd make his decision."

That made good sense to his mother.

"I said, 'You are the one picking the school, so remember, that's where you will be living the next 4-5 years,'" Priscilla said. "I told him he couldn't say, 'Yes, I'm going to this school,' and then drop out and come back home. It doesn't work that way in this household. Once you commit, you must stick it out."

The commitment timeline insisted upon by Colorado threw a wrench in Frazier's plan.

"He was hurt by Colorado," Priscilla said. "Because at that time, Nebraska was last on his list."

McCartney, a deeply religious man as well, did not make the kind of impression that Osborne and Hatfield did.

"I had heard a lot about Coach McCartney, about his involvement in Promise Keepers and all those things," Tommie said. When you talked to him, you did not get the impression that he was involved in all that—it just wasn't that apparent on the surface when I sat down and talked to him. It was a good visit. It did snow the last night I was there. Darian Hagan, the former Colorado quarterback, showed me around town. It was a really nice visit. I played basketball with several of the players—Kordell Stewart, their quarterback, and Darius Holland, the big defensive end who is now with the Green Bay Packers. Kordell was struggling that day. I think he was trying to do a little more than usual trying to impress the recruits. But he was really nice to me. All of them were."

Nebraska was the last of Frazier's five visits.

So far down on the list was Nebraska that Frazier scratched the Huskers and declared Colorado, Notre Dame and Clemson his final three choices. While his mother was glad to see Tommie moving forward, she feared that eliminating Nebraska without visiting was not a good decision.

"He did not want to visit Nebraska," Priscilla said. "He said he was tired of traveling. I said, 'You're going.' He said, 'I am not.' I said, 'You said you would go.' He said, 'My social life—with all this traveling, I have no social life.' So I said, 'Listen Tommie, you are a senior in high school; you have no life at all right now. You are going to start making your own life with this process. Look at your future; that's your life. You promised you will go, so you will go.'"

The phone rang, and it was Kevin Steele.

"Tommie went to his room because even though he didn't know who it was, he thought it was for me because I started chatting right away," Priscilla said.

"How are you Mrs. Frazier?" Steele asked.

"I've got good news and bad news," Mrs. Frazier said.

"Hit me with it," Steele said.

"The good news is he's shortened his list," Mrs. Frazier said.

"And the bad news?" Steele asked.

"You and Nebraska aren't on the list any more," Mrs. Frazier said. "He's not even coming to visit. I told him he's wrong. But he's not listening."

"Mrs. Frazier," Steele said, "can you put Tommie on the phone?"

Steele talked to Tommie for 20 minutes.

"I remember what I said," Steele said. "His mother told me, 'I'm not going to let him cancel, but in his mind, he is certain he is not going to visit.' I talked to him. I said, 'Tommie, you have five visits. Each lasts only 48 hours, and what you learn during that time will affect the rest of your life. If you cancel one of those visits, it could be the one that may have had the most positive effect on your life. If I told you all you had to invest was a 48-hour trip to see the future, would you do it?' He said, 'Yes.' I asked, 'Why would you throw that away?' He decided to visit."

His mother then heard Tommie calling out.

"Mom, pick up the phone!" Tommie said. "Coach Steele wants to talk to you."

Tommie hung up, and Steele talked again with Tommie's mother.

"You can calm down, Mrs. Frazier," Steele said. "He will come visit."

Kinnan also knew Frazier was wavering on whether to visit Nebraska.

"He was ready to cancel it," Kinnan said. "But we had sat down at the beginning of the year and talked about the reasons why he would go visit the five schools. He had to give all five at least a look. He came in on a Tuesday morning, and it was his decision if he should even visit Nebraska. I said, 'What is one more weekend? That way, there will be no questions left. You will know what feels right and you have to have all the pieces of the puzzles. Don't say you don't want to go to Nebraska before you have even visited. You have your whole life, and you don't want to end up second-guessing yourself.'"

That was good news to Priscilla, who liked Steele and Osborne more than any of the other coaches. Only Clemson's Ken Hatfield, who would be dismissed a year later as head coach, was as high on Mrs. Frazier's list as Nebraska's coaches.

"I was more comfortable with Coach Osborne and Coach Steele," Mrs. Frazier said. "They talked honestly, openly and sincerely about the things that were most important, which to me, as a mother, were the education and the support system."

The visit started off on a high note—there was unseasonably warm weather in Nebraska for that time of the year—and only got better.

"I flew into Lincoln on a Leer jet, which was fun," Tommie said. "Kevin Steele was with me, and he brought me to the offices where I met all the coaches. That was when I first met Turner Gill—I knew who he was, but I did not know, until that point, that he was on the staff. I checked in at the Cornhusker Hotel and got ready for dinner at the Legionnaires Club. Derek Brown showed me around that night. The next day were the traditional meetings, going to meet all the academic people."

Frazier's host during his recruiting trip to Lincoln was the player he would soon supplant on the Husker depth chart at quarterback,

Mike Grant, who is now an assistant coach for Iowa State, which is also a member of the Big 12. Ironically, Grant now coaches for the school that left what Frazier calls his worst memory ever in sports—the loss to the Cyclones in Ames in 1992. Grant also played high school football in Florida and faced Frazier's school several times.

"We had a common bond because we were both quarterbacks and also from Florida," Grant said.

Grant could do something that perhaps no one else could for Frazier: explain the many differences Frazier would encounter moving from the sunny beaches and fast-paced Florida life to cold, sleepy-by-comparison Lincoln, Nebraska.

"I knew it would be a big adjustment as far as the climate and the people," Grant said. "Obviously, I was biased in the favor of Floridians, so I wanted to help however I could."

Though Grant was four years ahead of Frazier in high school, Grant knew all about him before Frazier's visit.

"From the film I had seen, I saw that Tommie was very talented," Grant said. "And you could tell that it was a talent we really wanted—and just about every other school wanted as well. The Nebraska coaching staff was looking for a quarterback like that, one who was ready to come in and take over."

While Grant remembers a lot of recruits for things they said during their recruiting visit, it was what Frazier did not say that spoke volumes to Grant.

"Tommie was not bragging or anything," Grant said. "Some of the guys who come to visit as recruits let you know what they accomplished in terms of awards and wins. With Tommie, that just wasn't the case. He sort of looked around and listened and took it all in. He was very subtle whenever we talked football."

Yet Grant claims Tommie's lack of words was not mistaken for a lack of confidence.

"I saw he was shy but a leader in his own right," Grant said. "That's one of the special things about him. Really, he didn't have to be very vocal because all of his accomplishments spoke for themselves."

Grant's sincerity and honesty helped Frazier begin to give Nebraska serious consideration.

"Mike Grant showed me around. We had a great time," Frazier said. "Mike was a big reason why I came here. He was a great guy. When I had a question, he would always take time to answer it. A lot of other quarterbacks would not have made the time for someone in that situation. They would be hostile or let you figure it out on your own. Mike was always willing to help—there were no exceptions. I have so much respect for him."

Colorado, which had slid down the list after Frazier learned of Detmer's signing, officially fell off after Frazier visited Lincoln.

"Nebraska made a bigger impression on me than Colorado," Frazier said. "At that time, I didn't want to rush to judgment when it came to picking a school. I did not want to pick a school where I would end up unhappy and transferring. I wanted to make the right decision, one that I would be happy with and one that I would stick with for all four years of college."

"When he got there, the coaches called and kept us informed about how it was going during the visit," Priscilla said. "Tommie came back and said he liked it."

Kinnan said Colorado was Tommie's choice early.

"His first visit was to Colorado, and he really liked it," Kinnan said. "Their offensive coach, Les Steckel, was recruiting him. They were wanting to run more option football. Coach McCartney had said they would only sign one quarterback, so they wanted Tommie to commit early. Tommie told him he had given his word he would visit the other schools, so he could not commit to CU then. Colorado went ahead and got Koy Detmer, so they said to Tommie, 'We can't recruit you as quarterback, how about another position?' That closed the book. Had they been patient, Colorado might have gotten him."

Syracuse's geography and culture also worked against itself.

"Going to New York for basically a small-town Southern kid was not a fit, even though a lot of kids from Florida have gone up there," Kinnan said.

Clemson, however, was a good fit.

"Tommie liked Clemson and they really needed a quarterback," Kinnan said. "Tommie went to a clinic there, and it was funny because Tommie was better than anyone they had on the roster there—and Tommie was still in high school then."

Notre Dame was also a front-runner, and after CU dropped out of the process, Kinnan thought Frazier would join Lou Holtz.

"He enjoyed Notre Dame quite a bit when he went there," Kinnan said.

"I AM GOING TO NO...NO...NO...NEBRASKA"

Even the weather cooperated with Frazier's recruiting visit to Lincoln.

"It was about 65 degrees, unusually warm for a weekend," Kinnan said. "Their Leer jet picked him up, and they had a very classy individual, Kevin Steele, as the assistant coach recruiting him on the plane, too. Now you have to understand how special Kevin Steele is. Let me put it this way: After all of my years coaching, there are only two guys who stand out in my mind as always doing a great job: Carl Franks at Florida and Kevin Steele at Nebraska."

Steele was pleasantly surprised by the weather as he and Frazier were greeted by Osborne when they landed.

"When Tommie stepped off the plane, Coach Osborne said with a smile, 'Sorry it's a little windy, but normally the weather isn't quite like this,'" Steele said. "Coach Osborne was being funny without actually saying, 'It's about 30 degrees colder this time of year.'"

Still, Steele knew he had a tough sell trying to convince Frazier to come to Nebraska after he had visited Notre Dame and Clemson.

"The odds were against us," Steele said. "As we walked in the airport, the first thing I saw was a paper with a headline, 'Frazier to visit Nebraska, but he won't attend.' I was so irate that happened on the day we were trying to convince the guy to come here. That rattled me more than anything during the recruiting process. I talked to the other coaches, and we decided I had to show it to him because he was bound to see it while he was here, or at least hear about it. Tommie saw it and just laughed. He said, 'Well, the guy who wrote that isn't making the decision. I am. People always think they know what others are going to do, but they don't.' Tommie is his own man—a leader, not a follower."

Getting to know the Frazier family—regardless of whether Frazier would pick the Huskers—made it all worthwhile, according to Steele.

"The recruiting process was not nerve-racking at all—it was a lot of fun," Steele said. "It was a wonderful experience. I was sitting at one of Tommie's basketball games, and you couldn't talk to the parents or the recruit. So I would write notes to Mrs. Frazier, and the assistant coach's son would run the notes to her. I'm not a very good speller, and she caught a few of the words that were wrong—she was really funny about it. It was just fun to get to know people like that."

Nebraska became the perfect fit for Frazier for a lot of reasons. Not the least of which, according to Kinnan, was Tom Osborne.

"My feeling was, knowing Tommie's temperament and intensity, and knowing Coach Osborne was involved with the offense, it was the best fit," Kinnan said. "I don't know if Tommie could have avoided a personality clash at Notre Dame. Tom Osborne could take Tommie and bring him to the next level. Coach Osborne was the one who could bring out the best. Then Tom goes and hires Turner Gill to work with Tommie. Turner had experienced things Tommie would go through. So Nebraska was the obvious choice."

After the visits, the difficult task of making a final decision began.

"It was a tough choice as to what would be the final one," Frazier said.

Ironically, Frazier's first choice was the Big Eight—but it was the school in Boulder, Colorado, not Lincoln, Nebraska, that held his interest. Had the Buffs not been so far along in terms of receiving verbal commitments from other athletes, they might have landed Frazier.

"I received pressure from only one of the schools—Colorado," Frazier said. "Everyone else was like, 'Take your time, make the right decision.' When I visited Colorado, they already had 10 or 12 players commit that week. So it was like, 'Tommie, if you don't commit to us now, we can't guarantee that the scholarship is still going to be there down the line when you make your decision.'"

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The final two became easier to select—but picking one was still not something Frazier was ready to do.

"It did come down to Clemson and Nebraska," Frazier said. "I remember the day I dropped Notre Dame from the list. It was the day before signing, and the coach I talked to said, 'Remember, if you come to Notre Dame, you will be on television every game you play in college.' To this day, that still bothers me. They were trying to use TV exposure as a tool to recruit me. I never did talk to the Notre Dame coaches again. They did not know they had dropped off the list, but they had."

Frazier reflected once again on his recruiting visits as he prepared to narrow the list.

"The recruiting visit to Notre Dame was one of the best," Tommie said. "The weekend I was up there, they had just played Florida in the Sugar Bowl. Jerome Bettis was there, Ricky Watters and those guys. They showed me a good time and the campus was nice. But Nebraska and Clemson made the biggest impressions when I visited. They were just so honest with me. Those were the schools that said, 'You are the guy who will lead us to the next level.' The other schools were like, 'Well, if you come here, great; if not, that's life.' Nebraska and Clemson really wanted me to come there. The other schools did not make it seem like they really needed me. That's all any player coming out of high school wants—sincerity and honesty. And that is what I felt I was getting from Clemson and Nebraska."

Steele said it was tense in the final days leading up to Tommie's announcement. The day before, Steele had a brainstorm.

"It was during a noncontact time, so I could not call him or visit, but I had to hit him with one more thing," Steele said. "So I wrote him a letter with everything he had talked about to me—his goals and what he wanted. I wrote it pretty quickly and numbered all of his goals, how we would go about achieving them, that kind of thing."

Osborne knew the Huskers were in the running but was unsure exactly where Nebraska was on Tommie's list.

"Neither Coach Steele nor I knew what was going to happen," Osborne said. "We thought he had a good visit here, so we thought we had a good chance."

The sense of urgency became even greater when Steele talked to Tommie's mother.

"Tommie had put a Notre Dame sticker on the refrigerator that day," Steele said. "It didn't look good. I had to get him this letter. Still, I felt in my heart that he would pick Nebraska, but at that point I was not sure."

He also wasn't sure how to get the letter to Frazier. Steele believed getting the letter there the next morning would be too late because Frazier planned to announce his plans early at school.

"I wondered—how am I going to get it there?" Steele said. "I couldn't FedEx it. I couldn't mail it."

The light clicked on for Steele. He would fax the letter.

"I called the school for their fax number—no fax machine," Steele said. "I thought, 'That's OK,' so I called the district office—no fax machine. I called an assistant coach I knew in that area, but could not hook up with him, either."

Almost out of options, Steele knew he needed an emergency solution. The number to solve emergencies—911. Actually, Steele called the non-emergency number at the Bradenton police department.

"I knew that all police stations have fax machines," Steele said. "So I called them, and they put me through to a lady who was a sergeant. She started laughing, but she said, 'If you fax it to me, I will take it over to him personally.' I faxed it, and she put it in an envelope and took it to his school and asked to see Tommie Frazier. Of course when the police officer walked in, they instantly took her to Tommie. I wish I could have seen Tommie's face."

"I don't know if that letter had a lot to do with why he signed with us," Steele said. "It just talked about his goals and what a special person Tom Osborne is. But the letter did come at an important time because I don't think he had really made up his mind."

Frazier was both amused and touched by Steele's letter.

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"I was surprised because I could tell Coach Steele had gone through quite a bit of effort to get the letter to me," Frazier said. "At that point I had already decided on Nebraska. From the letter, I could tell even more that Coach Osborne and Coach Steele really did want me as a player and a person. They knew I could help their program. I think I still have that letter. The thing that Coach Steele did during the recruiting process was really get to know me and my family. He accepted me into his family, too. I honestly believe that even if I never would have played football at Nebraska, I would have still been a part of Coach Steele's family."

The decision went right down to the wire.

"On the morning of letter-of-intent day, I decided it would be Nebraska," Tommie said. "By the time Coach Steele's letter—the one he had faxed to the police station—got there, I had already decided on Nebraska, that morning in fact. But everyone around my school thought it would be Notre Dame."

"Everyone" included Tommie's mother.

"When it was time for him to sign, I had heard through the grapevine he was going to Notre Dame," Priscilla said. "Before his visits we had agreed that after going to all five schools, Tommie would write down what he liked and didn't like about each school, and we would discuss his best options—but he didn't do that."

"I felt like Coach Kinnan wanted him to go to Notre Dame," Priscilla said. "When I talked to Coach Kinnan, he said that was what he had heard, that Tommie would go to Notre Dame."

"As it turned out, we learned that he could not go to Notre Dame because they had visited one too many times, which was an NCAA violation," Priscilla said. "If he went to Notre Dame, it would probably mean an NCAA investigation and Tommie would lose a year of eligibility right away. I was like, 'This can't happen.' That would have messed up his future."

"I was still under the impression he was going to Notre Dame," Priscilla said. "The day he was going to announce where he would sign, I heard it on the news that there was a press conference scheduled in about an hour. I drove out to the school."

While Tommie had talked about Clemson and Nebraska, Priscilla was still under the impression that Notre Dame would be the choice.

"Tommie came in and Coach Kinnan said, 'Listen Tommie, you don't have to make up your mind right now,' " Priscilla said. "Tommie said, 'I am going to No...No...No...Nebraska.' Coach Kinnan said, 'Are you sure?' Tommie said, 'That's where I want to go. I am tired of the recruiting process. I am going to Nebraska.'"

"I was so relieved because I thought his career and future would be in jeopardy if he picked Notre Dame," Priscilla said. "It was like, 'Good, he's decided. Now everyone else can stop badgering him.' "

Priscilla told Tommie that the "No...No...No..." was not very nice.

"I thought you were going to say Notre Dame," Priscilla told her son.

"I was just hassling you," Tommie replied with a smile. "You did a good job helping me, Mom. I could tell you wanted Nebraska all along. After I thought about it, that's what I thought was best for me, too. I'm going there for me."

Tommie said he did not tell his mother his choice because it was not final until that press conference.

"My high school coach did not push me either way," Tommie said. "My mother did not know what school I had picked. I did not tell her that morning—she found out when everyone else did—when I signed the letter-of-intent. I literally decided that morning."

Ken Hatfield, who would be dismissed only one year later at Clemson, earned a place in Frazier's heart. But the lack of certainty surrounding Hatfield's future at Clemson was a deciding factor in Clemson falling out of the picture at the last minute.

"I picked Nebraska in part because I knew Coach Osborne and the staff would be there the entire time I was there," Frazier said. "I really wanted to go to Clemson, but there was a lot of speculation that Coach Hatfield would not be there in the future, or at least that he was on shaky ground. That's what put Nebraska over the hump when decision time came, the continuity of the coaching staff. Of

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course, not long thereafter, Coach Hatfield was no longer at Clemson."

Tommie paid no attention to whether Nebraska signed any other quarterbacks during the recruiting period or if the Huskers already had a supply of able quarterbacks—which NU did.

"It did not matter to me that they had signed other quarterbacks or that they had a lot of quarterbacks on the roster," Frazier said. "All I knew was that Nebraska told me that, if I earned it, I could play as a freshman. They told me that if I learned the system and did the things I was capable of doing, and showed that I could play, they would not hesitate to play a freshman. They told me that, and I believed them."

Frazier's coach told Osborne the news.

"We had that press conference at the school on letter-of-intent day," Tommie said. "I wasn't able to call Nebraska on letter-of-intent day, I believe it was against the rules, so my coach called Coach Osborne and told him that I was about to sign with the Huskers."

Kevin Steele received more than a letter-of-intent when he signed Tommie Frazier. He also got an extended family, one he still remains very much in contact with today even though Steele has left Nebraska for the NFL.

"That just shows that the relationship between the Fraziers and my family was real from the first day," Steele said. "I still call his parents and talk to Tommie. My two children and my wife regard Tommie's family as part of our family. I think it goes back to what anybody needs growing up—you need to be loved and nurtured and develop feelings of confidence and security. You have to be exposed to that early in life, and it has to be a constant. That's what is special about the Frazier family. Mr. and Mrs. Frazier have been married forever. Visit with Mr. and Mrs. Frazier, and you will see why their children are special people. That was the start of it for Tommie."

When Coach Osborne received the news that Frazier was coming to Lincoln, he too was pleased.

"Of course, we were real excited about that," Osborne said. "He was the best option quarterback in the country."

While Steele recruited dozens of players over the years, he admits there was a sense of urgency when it came to signing Frazier, then the highest-ranked option quarterback in the nation by the high school recruiting analysts. Frazier was seen as the player who could get Nebraska over the hump and win a national championship.

"I remember he was such an important recruit for our program at Nebraska," Steele said.

When Frazier announced his intention to come to Nebraska, Steele admitted he was pretty excited.

"Honestly, yes, you feel proud," Steele said. "But it's such a teamwork process. There have been other recruits at Nebraska just as important. But they didn't have as high a profile career as Tommie. We were in need of a quarterback, and that was the guy we targeted. He was one of the top recruits in America that year."

Tommie's high school coach, Joe Kinnan, was deluged with interview requests about Frazier when he picked Nebraska.

"I had Nebraska people ask me in interviews about Tommie's arm," Kinnan said. "I said, 'You guys have it wrong—not only is he a great option quarterback, but he has a very good arm.' Tommie's arm reminded me of Joe Ferguson, who starred in the NFL for the Buffalo Bills. Both Joe and Tommie had a lightning quick release and tremendous arm strength. In Tommie's case, we were not a drop-back passing football team. But I knew that Tommie Frazier could play football anywhere in the country. He's such a great runner—and he enjoyed doing that—that it would have been an injustice not to run the ball with him at quarterback. He was also our punter, and he returned punts as well. He was even our best long snapper, too—but obviously there was no way to use that skill since he also punted for us."

Grant said he developed an appreciation for Frazier's arm, something many in the media neither recognized nor grasped.

"He had a really nice arm, a really lively arm," Grant said. "He was very capable of throwing the ball."

After signing, Tommie felt like a different person.

“ I A M G O I N G T O N O ... N O ... N O ... N E B R A S K A ”

“The moment I signed, I felt a load of pressure lifted from my shoulders,” Tommie said. “I was like, ‘Yes, the hoopla is over. Now, I can get back to a normal life.’”

Notre Dame dropped out of the running because Frazier and his mother had been told that Notre Dame might have broken NCAA violations because coaches visited Frazier’s house while he was on the road visiting Nebraska.

“After I had signed, someone told me that it was good I did not sign with Notre Dame because they might have committed a violation recruiting me,” Tommie said. “I really don’t know what it would have been. It might have been with visits or something.”

When Frazier arrived at Nebraska, he and Steele’s relationship was just beginning. The two would sit for hours at a time as Steele had Tommie visualize what he wanted to happen at Nebraska, both on the field and off.

“Tommie and I used to sit and have dream sessions, just sitting and outlining what he wanted to make happen in that season, especially early in his career,” Steele said. “We would have extensive conversations after practice. He had a list of about 20 things: graduating, winning at least two national championships, leading the Big 8 and nation in rushing, passing for 1,000 yards, winning the Heisman, and so on. There were 20 goals, he accomplished 19 of them, the only one he didn’t achieve was winning the Heisman Trophy.”

Hatfield and his Clemson staff showed a lot of class after the signing.

“The Clemson coaches called and wished me well,” Tommie said. “They said they had heard it came down to Clemson and Nebraska, and they said they were glad I was happy with my choice. They said they hoped to play against us some time in college. They were so sincere. That was a nice touch.”

Ironically, the fact that Syracuse lost out on Frazier because firmly-established Syracuse starter Marvin Graves was only entering his sophomore year actually helped the Orangemen two years later.

“Paul Pasqualoni knew the big reason he didn’t get Tommie was

TOUCHDOWN TOMMIE

because of Marvin and that would not give Tommie a chance to play for three years," Kinnan said. "But it came full circle. The quarterback they have now, Donovan McNabb, was getting ready to choose between Nebraska and Syracuse two years later. Pasqualoni said the kid turned down Nebraska because Tommie was entering his sophomore year, and it was clear that he would be Nebraska's quarterback for the next three years, which meant McNabb wouldn't get a chance to play for a while if he picked the Huskers. So McNabb picked Syracuse. Pasqualoni said with a smile, 'We got Donovan because of Tommie.'"

MORE THAN READY TO PLAY

Lincoln was a world away—both culturally and geographically—from the busy, multi-racial community in which Frazier was reared in Florida.

Leaving Tommie in Lincoln was hard on his mother.

“He watched us get into the car,” Priscilla said. “He hugged me and said, ‘Don’t leave.’ I tried not to cry. He said, ‘I am going to keep a big smile on my face and be brave.’ That was it, I started crying right there. Then I could see him starting to cry. He had just turned 18 years old, and he was over a thousand miles from home. He needed to go far from home. He was a homebody, and had he gone to school down here near our home, he would have been at the house every weekend, and eventually, he wouldn’t have wanted to go back to school. Going way out there to Nebraska, he couldn’t come rushing back home. Because there, he can’t rush back home; I can’t afford a plane ticket, and he can’t hitchhike home.”

Tommie said Lincoln was a refreshing change from where he grew up.

“My impression of Nebraska was that it was quiet,” Tommie said. “And that was good. I grew up in an area where there were a lot of big cities. In a half hour, 40 minutes, I could be anywhere. In 30 minutes I could be in Tampa. In 20 minutes, I could get to St. Petersburg. In 10 minutes, I was in Sarasota. If I wanted to go to Orlando, maybe 90 minutes at the most and I’m there. So Lincoln gave me a chance to get away from the big-city life.”

When Frazier arrived in Lincoln, he was bigger than Steele and Osborne remembered.

“All the Fraziers grew after they graduated,” said Joe Kinnan.

"They were just late developing physically. Tommie probably grew an inch-and-a-half from the time he signed to when he showed up at Nebraska. Coach Osborne saw him that summer and said, 'I don't remember him being that tall.' But Tommie was only 17 when he graduated."

Frazier enjoyed lifting weights.

"Some of Tommie's best basketball games came the night after working out hard that morning," Kinnan said. "He just had great explosive strength."

Right away, Tommie's career as a Husker took a small step forward and then two giant steps backward.

"It did not go well when I first came to Nebraska," Tommie said. "I showed up ready to play. But when the freshmen showed up, I only played one day. Then, I came down with a horrible stomach virus and lost 15 pounds in a matter of only a few days. I didn't practice much with the freshman class at all. Then, when the upper-classmen reported, it took me a couple of days to recover from the illness. I really didn't have a chance to make much of an impression before two-a-days started."

That would soon change.

"When I did get into it, I saw that I fit in," Tommie said. "I knew the guys were older and bigger than me, but I thought, 'I can play with them.' I heard about how Trev Alberts, Travis Hill and Kevin Raemakers had said they didn't care that I was a freshman, they would treat me like one of them—they would hit me the same way they did everyone else. I knew I had gained their respect. I remember a scrimmage when I got past Travis Hill, and made him look kind of bad. I knew Travis was a great player, so that told me I could make it here. They accepted me, and that really meant a lot. I knew then that I was a guy who could play football for Nebraska."

But he almost did not. In fact, Frazier decided to transfer to Clemson after not getting any action during a 45-24 romp over Arizona State.

"A few games into the season, I was ready to leave Lincoln—for good," Tommie said.

Frazier said he was not looking to be handed the starting job. Rather, he felt he wasn't being afforded the same opportunity and chance that the other quarterbacks were getting. And Tommie felt like he had earned at least that.

"It wasn't that I felt I deserved anything special," Tommie said. "But I was ready to play. We were playing Arizona State and just blowing them out. It really bothered me. There was no possibility of redshirting me at that point anyway. We were beating them by so many points that I felt like I should get in there and at least run some plays. That really upset me. Here we were, leading by so many points, and all the quarterbacks had played, except me. Mike Grant, Joel Cornwell and John McMillen had all played. I was behind McMillen on the depth chart, and both he and Joel played that game. Had I known that was going to happen—not playing in a blowout—I would have redshirted. At that point, I was just so upset. I was going to transfer, probably to Clemson."

His mother claims to have inadvertently started the whole incident.

"The coaches had kept saying he'd get a chance," his mother said. "He'd get in a minute or so in the fourth quarter. I understood it was because they had the senior quarterback and a bunch of other quarterbacks ahead of him. We would see him standing on the sidelines—and that was enough for me the first year. I knew he wouldn't be a superstar the first year. But the two games we did get to see, he didn't get in to play at all. So when he called, I said, 'How are you doing?' He said, 'Fine.' I said, 'Why aren't you playing? I'm not going to be sitting up here watching you. I can go shopping.' He said, 'Why do you want to go shopping instead of watching my game?' I said, 'I don't want to see someone else's child out there playing. I want to see you.' He told me that he didn't know what was going on with the situation because he was doing well in practice. So he went to Coach Gill the next day."

The coaches had often mentioned that they had an open-door policy—so Frazier went in search of that door.

"I went to Coach Gill's office," Tommie said. "He had always

said, 'If you have something on your mind or you feel something is not right, come talk to me about it.' So Monday morning, I went straight to his office. I explained to him what was going on in my head, that I wanted to leave and transfer because I did not appreciate what happened Saturday. He said, 'Slow down, don't rush to do anything. Let me get Coach Osborne.'"

Coach Osborne quickly found the time to meet with his restless freshman signal caller.

"Coach Gill, Coach Osborne, Coach Steele and Coach Solich," Tommie said. "I told them how this was something that bothered me badly during the game and after the game. Coach Osborne explained the situation to me."

"We feel that there are still some things you need to work on," Coach Osborne said.

"He said I needed to work on audibles and that I didn't know the system that well," Tommie said. "I wasn't buying it. I told him that at that point, the only way I would improve in those areas was in a game situation. Of course you can do it in practice, but it is not the same thing. A player won't get better until he's in the heat of battle. Coach Osborne kept asking me to be patient. Coach Gill was the same way. He felt I was not ready."

Osborne knew Frazier never had a hard time expressing himself. And he was glad that Frazier knew the lines of communication were always open at Nebraska.

"Tommie really asserted himself," said Coach Osborne. "If he would have felt like he was awed, he would have faded into the background and never would have been able to start after the fourth game of the season."

"They called my mother and talked to her, telling her that I was thinking about transferring," Frazier said. "From that point on, she acted as a mediator."

'You can't leave,' my mother told me. 'You made a commitment to them. Give it more time, and see how it pans out.' "

Steele still remembers the troubled look Gill was sporting when he came to Steele's office.

"Turner walked into my office and said, 'Kevin, Tommie needs to talk to you,'" Steele said. "I saw the look on Tommie's face—one I had never seen before. In fact, the only other time I saw that look was when Tommie had the clot problem. It's odd, because every other time adversity strikes, Tommie's eyes sparkle because that's when he was at his best. Not that day. His jaw was set, and there was just a faraway look in his eyes—it was a distance that stretched across the country."

Gill said while he was not expecting to see Frazier that day under those circumstances, Gill remembers going through a similar period while he was a freshman at Nebraska.

"The situation was unique, but I think most college kids and athletes think about transferring at least once," Gill said. "And it can be for a variety of reasons, from not being at home and in a new territory to something not going right and thinking it might be better somewhere else—you aren't very comfortable because you have new surroundings, and that discomfort level rises because something is not going well. I know I went through the same scenario, but in my case I just wanted to be closer to home."

Steele told Frazier that he expected his star recruit to have doubts.

"I knew he would have some of the thoughts he was having," Steele said. "I said, 'When you go to college, there are up days and down days—no place is perfect. It's not like going to live in Disneyland.' Tommie was still a little shaken. So I went and called his mother after I went to get Coach Osborne. And I will never forget the look on Coach Osborne's face. He had a funny, funny look on his face—a really different look. It was a look that told Tommie, 'Look, I want you to be at peace with yourself.' Coach Osborne did not want Tommie to be happy just for Coach Osborne's own motivation. He wanted Tommie to be happy for himself, to feel good, safe and secure inside. That's just how Coach Osborne is."

After talking with Coach Osborne, Frazier spoke with his mother from Steele's office.

"He got on the phone with his mom after she and I talked," Steele said. "The next day, it was over."

And yet it was just beginning.

"He did play soon thereafter," Steele said. "I think at the time he thought of leaving, maybe Tommie was searching for reassurance. He was 18 years old and away from home for the first time in his life. What came out of all this went back to the reason why he came to Nebraska: People make places. He knew we were going to help him through this. If he walked away, he would just have to begin the same transition somewhere else. So the answer was not to walk away. We helped him put the right things in front of him, and he worked things out for himself. He sincerely knew that he was cared for and loved. That was more important than actually playing."

Everyone at that meeting, Frazier said, understood that he was within a phone call of transferring that morning.

"They knew they might have lost me, that I really was close to transferring," Tommie said.

The meeting did more, Gill said, than answer football questions.

"As much as the meeting helped clear the air, I think the solution to that whole thing was time," Gill said. "There had to be more trust developed, and that continued to happen as the relationship developed. Coach Osborne was truthful and honest, but the bottom line was, Tommie really was a player, and he felt it was his time. As coaches, we don't have all the answers. We knew he was good on the field, but all we really did during that time was make sure he knew he was cared for and loved. We wanted to make sure he didn't feel like he was alone."

One of those not surprised by Frazier's decision to approach the coaches to force the issue was Grant.

"I realized even when he was visiting on his recruiting trip that he was very anxious to play," Grant said. "And it makes sense, at least it does in a case where you have a player like Tommie Frazier. He felt he had the ability, yet he was sitting around and not doing anything when game time rolled around. So I understood where he was coming from."

Frazier's familiarity with Nebraska's system, and the quick nature in which he soon mastered it, caught even Grant a little off guard.

"I knew right away that he really fit in Nebraska's system very well," Grant said. "That was one of the biggest things in his favor. I'm not saying he could not have done the same things elsewhere, because he might have been able to. I just saw how he fit into the system tremendously. All the things that we do—running the ball, the option—were things that he liked to do. So when he came here, right away, he was not afraid of doing anything within the system. When you can do that, the chances are you are going to be successful. It was an outstanding decision for Tommie to come to Nebraska. Obviously, he could have gone anywhere, but Nebraska really fit his talent."

While Nebraska is known for its constant repetition in practice—which Frazier enjoyed—he did not need additional direction after receiving initial instructions.

"When you told Tommie something, you didn't have to tell him again," Gill said. "You told him something once, and that was it. That will always stick out in my mind."

Getting over the hump of the first few months in Lincoln was important, according to Frazier's high school coach at Manatee, Joe Kinnan.

"You have to finish your first year anyway because of the commitment of the national letter-of-intent," Kinnan said. "I think part of it was that he was homesick. All college freshmen are homesick—until the first time they come home. Once they go back home, it's not like it was when they left. Their friends have all gone away, too. These are things a youngster has to deal with."

Kinnan was more surprised that Frazier was not already starting.

"I thought he would start sooner," Kinnan said. "I saw Mike Grant play in 1985 when he was a sophomore. He had to play in a different offense every year in high school, so I thought he was better as a sophomore than when he was a junior and a senior. At

Manatee, we run option football and pattern our offense after what Syracuse and Nebraska do. We study their film. So we knew what Tommie could do up there at Nebraska. I knew Mike did not have that great of an arm. As it unfolded, I think Nebraska started Tommie at the right time. They didn't need to throw him into the fray at Washington early in his freshman year."

At the same time, the whole incident ended up only reinforcing Frazier's belief that he had chosen the right school.

"It was a good example of communication, that Nebraska encourages a real open-door policy," Tommie said. "It was just a situation where after we sat down and had that talk, I was better. I was upset and things had built up, so we had to sit down and talk about it and work it out."

A couple of weeks later, starting quarterback Mike Grant was having back problems.

"I ended up starting against Missouri," Frazier said. "And that was unexpected because when I left the office after talking with Coach Gill and Coach Osborne, I thought I would, in the best-case scenario, get more time when games were out of reach."

Osborne was the one who announced that Frazier was starting.

"I remember when Coach Osborne said I was starting," Tommie said. "It was in a quarterbacks' meeting. Mike had a bad back at the time. At that point, I had moved up to second team."

"Mike, we understand you are hurting, with the back problems," Osborne said. "We are going to go with Tommie to start the game. Mike, if you are capable of playing, we will play you—but we don't want to take the risk of damaging your back."

Grant, who could have played through the minor back problems, said while it was hard for him to take a backseat to the meteoric rise of Frazier, such a move was inevitable.

"It was tough for me personally," Grant said. "I knew it was better for the team at the time, and I knew how I needed to handle it—like a professional and a team player. I have seen it go the other way where guys held resentment, but those guys ended up being like a cancer on the team. With his career just beginning and mine

almost over, it wasn't the time for me to start something—and believe me, if I wanted to start a riot, I could have. I didn't deem that necessary. I really think Tommie was the guy the team needed in there."

Frazier said the meeting was very businesslike.

"Coach Osborne told the other quarterbacks that they might get the opportunity," Tommie said. "He said that if something went wrong with me, the next guy would play. I was excited, very excited. But I kept it inside. When you have other guys there, and you are all competing for the same job, you can't jump up and say, 'All right, I'm the man!' You can't act like you just won a new car. That shows poor sportsmanship and that you are only in it for yourself. When I called my mom that night and talked to her, I probably showed more excitement."

Unknown to Tommie, his mother already had received a phone call.

"Coach Steele called me and said, 'Your baby is going to be playing. Don't say anything because it's not official, and I don't want to get in trouble,'" Priscilla said. "I said, 'I will let Tommie tell me.' Tommie called and I acted surprised, 'Oh really?' "

Getting the starting nod did little to placate Frazier. Now the quest to improve each day grew in importance because he did not want to yield the job he had just gained.

"I knew I could lose the job just as easily as I got it," Tommie said. "The only reason I was starting was because Mike's back had been hurting the past few weeks. At the time, I even thought that once Mike's back was better, he'd be the starter as soon as he was well. I knew Coach Osborne's policy was that you could not lose your job because of an injury. I would not have hesitated to step back to the bench when Mike was back because at that time, he knew the system the best."

Another little known item is that Grant was the consummate team player from Frazier's first day in Lincoln.

"Mike and I had a great relationship," Tommie said. "We both understood that side of the game, that only one guy could start. He

also knew that when I was a freshman, the team was looking toward the future. Mike was very supportive. We maintain that friendship today. A lot of people don't know that Mike and I grew up near each other. When I was in eighth grade, Mike's team played my high school."

As more games passed, Tommie became more comfortable, although he admits to feeling growing pains as he took control of the offense.

"That year was a learning experience because I progressed, got a year of Division I football under my belt and had learned a lot about the system, although I knew I had more to learn," Tommie said. "I was happy with the success."

Husker assistant coach Ron Brown said Frazier took control the first time he entered a game as a freshman.

"He came into the huddle for his first play, and some of the linemen were talking as he was getting ready to call the play," Brown said. "Keep in mind, these guys were juniors and seniors and Tommie was a freshman. Tommie grabbed the facemask of one of the guys who was talking and said, 'Listen up!' From that point on, everyone knew what a leader he was."

Former center Aaron Graham was in the huddle that day when Frazier made his debut.

"I think I was the one who first told the story," Graham said. "I was the one who witnessed it. Sure, some guys were caught off guard, but hard feelings? Absolutely not. As a player, that was what you looked for, and hoped for, in a quarterback. If you have a quarterback who will not stand up and be a leader, you will have problems. A lack of leadership was never an issue with Tommie. What I really admire is that when he stepped onto the field and into the huddle, because of his competitive nature, it brought everyone to another level."

Graham said he wasn't offended by Frazier's action.

"There were some people outside of the program and in the media who mistook Tommie's self-confidence as a kind of arrogance," Graham said. "If you did not play with the guy, you just

could not understand it. Yet if you talked to any player at any level, he wanted what Tommie had brought to the field."

The entire incident is not a particularly fond memory for Frazier, but he said he just did what he felt was right in the heat of battle.

"It was hard at the time," Frazier said. "But if I'm the starting quarterback, I have to have their attention, and I have to show enthusiasm. That's how upperclassmen are when a freshman comes in—they don't always listen right away. Everyone in that huddle was so surprised that they were speechless—not intimidated—but just quiet, which is why I did that. All the way to that point I was quiet in practice. I regret having to do it, but at the time, it was something that had to be done. Looking back, I am sensitive to how it was taken because I don't want to use power over anyone. But there are times when a leader has to show that power, control or authority—whatever you want to call it."

Coach Osborne said that was just Frazier's style.

"Tommie was somebody who didn't beat around the bush a lot," Osborne said. "He let you know where he stood. I didn't feel as though he was abrasive, but it was a little unusual for a freshman to come in and take charge like that. At the same time, it was necessary to get done what he did."

Nebraska quarterback coach Turner Gill said despite the possible clash of personalities, Frazier was very sure of what he was doing and where he was going to take the Huskers.

"There were some things that maybe other players were uncomfortable with, but the bottom line was that Tommie knew what he was doing," Gill said. "The players could see that. Tommie was a leader by example. He took every play in practice like it was a game. The intensity he had in meetings was as if we were in the middle of a game. You always look for that in players, especially quarterbacks, but in a lot of cases you don't get that. Some people on the team weren't that intense, and there were some comments every once in a while about how Tommie should lighten up, especially in practice. But Tommie wanted to be the best quarterback, and we wanted to be the best team. And everyone knows that starts in practice."

Another positive thing to come out of that was that the Huskers knew Frazier would never act out of character.

"Everybody has their own personality and way of doing things," Gill said. "I always told Tommie, or any quarterback, 'I want you to be yourself. If you aren't yourself, your teammates won't trust you. They will see that you are acting out of character, and they won't respond to you as a leader.' With Tommie, it wasn't an issue because he was always himself, and very sure of what he was doing."

Aaron Graham said his memories of Frazier stretch far beyond that first huddle.

"As far as what I say when people ask me about Tommie and what it was like to play with him," Graham said, "what I tell them is not necessarily anything to do with off-the-field stuff. In the locker room before the games, he was his own man. It wasn't that he was liked, or disliked. What you have to understand is Tommie Frazier is such a competitor and so focused on what he wants to do, he won't let anything distract him. I really appreciate that about him. That's why he was so great in the big games because all the hype or hostile crowds never affected him. His focus was never shaken, regardless of the circumstances. To have that kind of player on your team is very reassuring. I've never met anyone else like that."

"I don't know anybody who said, 'I don't like Tommie'—that's not how it was because no one ever said anything bad about Tommie," Graham said. "It was strictly a working relationship. For some of the other players, there was more of a camaraderie that we'll never forget, and we will be lifelong friends from what we experienced. At the same time, there is a lifelong bond between everyone who played with Tommie Frazier—winning. You could talk to anyone else who played with him and ask them the same thing, about what they remember about Tommie; it won't be a heartfelt hug or tender conversation—it will be about watching probably the best college football quarterback ever, and that we lost only three times in four years with him starting."

Osborne said Frazier's competitiveness never got in the way of Frazier's ability to take direction from the coaches.

"Tommie was a very coachable guy," Osborne said. "He was never insubordinate."

Gill agreed.

"The biggest thing is Tommie led by example," Gill said. "One thing I remember is he is a guy who always did what you asked him to do."

Aaron Davis, a former reserve Husker and Tommie's roommate during Frazier's sophomore year, remembers the day Frazier took control of the team.

"Here he is, an 18-year-old kid, grabbing a fifth-year senior by the facemask yelling, 'Shut up and listen!' " Davis said. "Sure, it shocked a lot of the linemen—and really, a lot of players on the team, especially the upperclassmen. But looking back, that's what we needed."

Rod Little said Frazier enjoyed having the weight of the world on his shoulders.

"Tommie has always been the kind that if you tell him he can't, or if his back is against the wall, he will prove you wrong," Little said. "He will pull out all stops and give you everything he has. The determination that kid has is unbelievable."

Tyrone Williams also recalls other times when Frazier asserted himself.

"There have been times where Tommie didn't see eye-to-eye with a teammate or the coach, and Tommie said something," Williams said. "But it was never anything about them personally. If Tommie saw something that was going to keep him from winning—and he saw the talking in the huddle doing it that day—then he was going to say something."

Williams said that day was more than just Frazier's debut as the Huskers quarterback—it was his first shot at leading the team, something Frazier took great pride in.

"Tommie has always been a forthright kind of guy," Williams said. "He's never been scared to step up and be a leader."

Mike Grant said some of the Nebraska offensive linemen—and upperclassmen in general—took offense to Frazier's brashness.

"At first, it kind of surprised some of the guys," Grant said. "I guess it just seemed kind of abrupt and a little abrasive. A lot of people were turned off by the types of things that he did like that. Some of the players didn't appreciate that. This young man did it on the field. That's what you have to do taking over the team—that's what a quarterback is supposed to do. As long as you back it up on the field and deliver, there's not much anyone can say. If he didn't get it done on the field, something might have come out of all that. But as everyone knows, Tommie knew exactly what he was doing out there."

Grant was just the opposite in terms of his relationship with his teammates.

"I don't know if you can say 'this' way is better than 'that' way," Grant said. "It depends on the player. I had a lot of friends on the team. It is always understood that if you are going to lead, you have to be vocal at certain times. And part of how you do that comes from your personality."

While Grant said most players accepted—and respected—Frazier, he said the leadership style, simply by its nature, kept the players at arm's length, something Frazier, as a loner, did not mind at all.

"I would sit down and have lunch with him—but we had that kind of relationship," Grant said. "Still, today, speaking to him, he's the same way he was then. I don't know what type of relationships he developed with his teammates—or if those existed then or exist now. However, I do know that Tommie and I are friends and we always will be. Now if you are asking me if Tommie would go when they have a reunion, I could not honestly tell you that he would."

Rod Little said the same sort of situation arose when Frazier was in high school.

"I know he went through some tough times because it's hard when you take that step to become a leader," Little said. "He started making that step in high school when he was playing as a sophomore. You know how kids are; they don't like listening to anyone, much less someone younger than they are. So Tommie

comes into a game and basically, through his commands, announces that it's his team. That's hard for other players to swallow. But as a coach, you know it is a necessity. He was always a couple of years behind his teammates in school because he was young for his grade, and he was always as good as the other kids, so he played up a couple of levels. Kids resented that, but he thrived on that because of his desire to win."

Tyrone Williams said the facemask-grabbing story certainly was not shocking. Rather, it was in character with how Williams knew Frazier to be over the years.

"He played quarterback during his whole career," Williams said. "He's the leader, not a follower. That's why he is always a step ahead on the field; he knows the destination and how to get there. That is just the way Tommie is, and everyone accepted that. It doesn't mean everyone liked him all the time, because he was very hard to get close to. He liked to be alone. But does it mean he wasn't well-respected? Absolutely not. Tommie was very respected by the players and coaches."

AN UNDYING MEMORY: AMES, IOWA, 1992

The highs and lows of the first year pale in comparison to what Frazier calls his “career low.”

With a record of 7-1 heading into Ames, Iowa, the Huskers were rolling, especially as they headed to lowly Iowa State after NU pounded rival Colorado, 52-7, and then Kansas, 49-7, on the two previous Saturdays. But on a blustery day in Ames against a team that was the biggest of underdogs, the wheels came off for the Huskers.

“I will always remember that year because of the loss to Iowa State,” Tommie said. “That was the single most devastating thing that ever happened in my life, as far as sports are concerned.”

The team was out of sync at every turn.

“In the huddle we looked at each the whole game asking, ‘What is going on? What is wrong with us today?’ We just could not get our plays to work,” Frazier said. “That day, Iowa State was that good. They did not want to stop us, they just wanted to contain us. They did both—no ifs, ands or buts about it.”

Frazier started receiving phone calls as soon as he arrived back in his dorm room on the University of Nebraska campus.

“I knew how people were when we won. But after that game, I saw the other side,” Frazier said. “I got death threats, crank calls, people telling me ‘Pack your bags up and go home,’ or ‘We wasted a scholarship on you.’ In the dormitory, it’s easy to get your phone number. All someone has to do is call campus information and get your number that way.”

Testimony to Frazier’s competitiveness is that the death threats did not bother him as much as losing the game did.

“The death threats—there was more than one—did not bother

me because those were just emotional people who were upset because they live and die with Nebraska football," Frazier said. "What did bother me was that people wanted to judge me based on one game, and that simply was not fair. The circumstances surrounding the game were not the best. We had a lot of injuries. I had hurt my knee during that game. Coach Osborne did not say much to me after that game. It was just one of those things where the team lost, not one player. We had overlooked Iowa State, so we had no one to blame but ourselves. We can't blame it on the weather. Iowa State went out and played its game. We can't blame it on injuries. With the talent level we have, injuries should not have been an issue against Iowa State. I could have played the best game I could, and we still would not have won that game. We were just off. In the whole time I was here, that was the worst game I played."

That loss derailed any championship hopes the Huskers were harboring. It would become even more of a burden in the following weeks as teams at, or near, the top of the poll fell like flies.

"It was upsetting to me, not just that we lost, but if we could have won that game, what would have happened the rest of the season? We were ranked sixth going into that game, and three of the top five teams lost the following week," Frazier said. "So had we done what we should have and beaten Iowa State, we might have been playing for the national championship that year, too. That's what the Iowa State game meant—it killed the chance to play for the national championship game all four years here at Nebraska."

The loss to Washington early in the season is also something Frazier reflects on.

"That was just a fluke," Tommie said. "The deal was that the refs called a noncatch a touchdown. I played with the guy in Canada, who was the receiver at Washington on that play. So when I saw him in Montreal with the Alouettes, I said, 'You didn't catch that ball—you know that, don't you?' He said, 'You are exactly right, I didn't catch it. But the ref said I caught it, and that's it.' I mean, the guy even admitted it. So you could have just scratched that loss as well."

Like the two regular season losses, the 27-14 Orange Bowl loss to Florida State—and to former high school friend, FSU wide receiver Tamarick Vanover, who had a touchdown catch—was a bitter pill to swallow. Frazier completed 10 of 21 passes for 146 yards and two touchdowns.

"The Orange Bowl was a disappointment that year," Frazier said. "We were playing against the No. 3 team in the nation. A couple of the turnovers that I made in that game, I felt, cost us the game. But I did not hang my head. Turnovers happen. We were not expected to win, but we wanted to win."

Tommie's mother watched that game on television.

"I have always been proud of him, and I was even when he lost that game to Iowa State," she said. "But I told him, 'See, you guys go in there and were so confident that you had that little team beat. They wanted it more than you did. You guys were thinking about the Orange Bowl. One little team was waiting to knock your butt flat, and they did. They only won two games that year, and you guys were one of them. No matter how far you go, you have to watch out for the little teams. The little guy knocked the big chief down.'"

Still, the two defeats and bowl loss only strengthened Frazier's resolve. While a lot has been made about the Huskers' motto of "Unfinished Business" entering the 1994 season, Frazier said the roots of that slogan began in Ames, Iowa. While the season included more defeats and death threats than Tommie had ever dreamed of, he was now in Lincoln for better or worse.

"After that season, any thoughts I had of leaving Nebraska were gone," Tommie said. "We had come closer than a lot of people might have thought of having a chance to play for a national championship."

FIRST SHOT AT THE NATIONAL TITLE

While everything pointed toward Frazier being the Huskers' quarterback, something else had happened to raise some doubt. Tony Veland was healthy after a knee problem and a broken collarbone.

"My sophomore year, there was still some doubt as to whether I would be the starting quarterback," Frazier said. "Tony Veland was back, healthy, for the first time in a while, and he was getting stronger. He had been making a real move up the depth chart before he was hurt."

However, just like Grant, Veland was first class all the way, making the young Frazier's job that much easier by the way Veland handled himself.

"He was always a class act," Frazier said. "I have so much respect for Tony Veland."

Veland, a born-again Christian, took Frazier aside and gave him advice on how to deal with the pressure of being the quarterback at Nebraska, a job whose prestige is matched only by the scrutiny that comes with the territory.

"Tony Veland made a big impression on me, and I believe he is destined for big things in life on a much larger scale than just football," Frazier said. "He dealt with all the adversity so well. He switched positions and dealt with broken bones and a knee problem. But he was always so upbeat about things. I have to believe Tony will affect a lot of people outside of football in his life."

Veland holds Frazier in the same regard. Ironically, Frazier ended up helping Veland, who was able to hone his skills as a defensive back once he was bumped out of the quarterback picture by Frazier. Thus, Veland is now a defensive back in the NFL, an

opportunity he likely would not have been afforded had he remained a quarterback.

"You have to understand that, unlike a lot of the other people, I didn't think that Tommie was going to just assume the starting job when I returned, and he was entering his sophomore year," Veland said. "At the same time, once I saw him, especially up close, you could tell that he was going to be the guy running the show. I could tell it was just a matter of time. But, looking back, it worked out the best for me, too."

Frazier realized the job was his only on a day-to-day basis.

"Going into the fall, I wanted to be the starter," Frazier said, "but I still had to prove myself on the field."

The Huskers, under Frazier's guidance, opened the season with routs over North Texas (76-14) and Texas Tech (50-27).

"After the season started, I knew I had the starting job locked up," Frazier said. "After that first game, which we won pretty soundly, I didn't have to really worry about losing the job. Coach Osborne does not let you know that it is your job to keep. But if you go out, play consistently, and don't do anything to hurt the team, you are going to keep your job. If you are playing well and the team is losing, you will still keep your job. My sophomore year, I knew the only thing that would cost me the starting job was if I was injured or if I went downhill in a hurry, which I was not about to let happen."

A potential roadblock came in the form of UCLA, unranked and seeking to vault into the rankings—which it would have, had it been able to pick up the victory against then No. 8-ranked Nebraska in the third game of the season for NU. In the Rose Bowl at Pasadena, Trev Alberts was a one-man wrecking crew for Nebraska on defense and Frazier was good enough at quarterback for the Huskers to escape with a 14-13 win. While a lot of Big Red fans flooded talk radio with their concern that night, Frazier claimed the win was a springboard.

"A lot of people thought the UCLA game was the low point of the year because we held on for a narrow 14-13 win," Frazier said.

"But the UCLA game was the high point of the year. We lost (I-back) Calvin Jones to an injury. Then, (I-back) Damon Benning had a rough game, with a few fumbles in his first five carries."

A well-known player who had been widely hailed as a top recruit made a big impression when the Husker offense needed it the most that day.

"That was Lawrence Phillips' coming-out day," Frazier said. "That showed that Calvin had a solid backup, and that had been a big question surrounding the team. When Lawrence went for more than 100 yards against UCLA, that was a critical juncture of the season."

Phillips, a true freshman at the time, had 137 yards on 28 carries to key the Husker win.

However, Frazier believes Nebraska would have lost had fate not dealt the Bruins an even more cruel blow. Skip Hicks, UCLA's top halfback, was, like Jones, injured during the game.

"That game hinged not on our backs, but on UCLA's great back, Skip Hicks," Frazier said. "I still feel that if Skip had not been hurt, we would have lost because when he got hurt, he already had 90 yards in the first quarter. When he went out, they completely lost their running game. I am not saying that our defense was not good because we had a very good defense. But when he was in there, they were running the ball at will. He was that quick, and he could make people miss."

Any looking back from that point on was a waste of time.

"We really rolled the next week," Frazier said. "We beat Colorado State, 48-13, at Memorial Stadium."

The game proved costly for the visitors from the Western Athletic Conference. As Nebraska and its much-hyped about "Pipeline" (consisting mostly of second, third and fourth teamers in the second half) continued to pound away at the line of scrimmage, the Rams nearly became an endangered species.

"They had something like a dozen players get hurt that game," Frazier said, noting the affect that Nebraska's physical style of play often has on opponents. "We never hurt other teams' players inten-

tionally. We don't play dirty. We just go out there and play our style. If teams can't stand the kind of style we bring, it is a big disadvantage for them."

Frazier credits Osborne and the coaching staff for a game plan that took everything into consideration that day, including Colorado State's new coaching staff.

"We ran inside a lot that game," Frazier said. "The reason why was because Colorado State had just hired Sonny Lubick. Coach Lubick had been the defensive coordinator at Miami, and he had faced Coach Osborne a few times. Coach Lubick focused on the option game. So we made a choice to beat them inside."

That season, Frazier knew that no matter how good he thought he was, he would always take a back seat—gladly, by the way—to Nebraska's system, for which Frazier lavishly heaps credit for the success.

"People don't realize how good Nebraska's program is until they experience it first-hand, either becoming a part of it or coaching against it," Frazier said. "People think that because I was there, we won all those games. That was not the case. Take away those offensive linemen and the defensive players, and we don't have the same season. I might have run the offense well, but there were others who could, too—like Mike Grant or Tony Veland. A football team is like a body. The quarterback is the head, but if you don't have strong legs, arms, a chest and back, the body—or team—does not work to its full capacity."

No more ambushes lay in the battles the Huskers faced before finding out who they would do battle with in the Big 8 Championship team's bowl—the Orange Bowl.

"The rest of that year went well," Frazier said. "We had a couple of tough games back to back on the road against Colorado (21-17) and Kansas (21-20). But we made it to the Orange Bowl to play Florida State for the national championship."

Frazier, only a sophomore, had his first taste that season of what he believed to be media coverage that was so far off the mark that it actually insulted his Husker teammates, in addition to belittling

the accomplishments of the Big Red's Orange Bowl opponent in January, 1994: Florida State.

"I had a negative feeling from the hype going into that game," Frazier said. "It was one of those things where the game was built up as Tommie Frazier against (Florida State quarterback) Charlie Ward, not Nebraska against Florida State. The press made it sound like Nebraska was only there because of me, and that Florida State was only there because of Charlie Ward. Look at the other players at Nebraska that year. Look at the other players at Florida State that year. There were a lot of great players on both sides."

Manatee High School football coach Joe Kinnan believes Frazier's arm was at least equal to that of his Florida State counterpart, Charlie Ward.

"A lot of people did not know that Charlie Ward ran the option in high school, but they lined up in the shotgun," Kinnan said. "But a coach would have to be a fool not to use Tommie's running skills."

Heartbreak came on an orange platter as several questionable calls went in favor of Florida State and a missed field goal by the Huskers left Nebraska on the short end of an 18-16 contest. Yet Nebraska had only itself to blame—after taking the lead with 1:16 left, the 76 seconds were more than enough time for the Seminoles to move the ball down the field and score.

Florida State thus gave its coach, Bobby Bowden, his first—and to this day, only—national championship.

"To lose that game 18-16 was very hard," Frazier said. "That was the hardest it ever was to walk off a field after a game. I had nothing left, all my physical and mental energy was on the field. To come out with a loss was hard. Everyone had written us off. We were a 17-point underdog, yet we were the No. 2 team playing the No. 1 team. I have never heard of anything like that, where the No. 2 team in the nation was a 17-point underdog. There were some questionable calls in that game that I still look back at today. At the time it really bothered me. But one thing people have to realize is that referees are human, too. They are a part of the game. You can't fire a referee because he makes mistakes, because I make mistakes, too."

TOUCHDOWN TOMMIE

Kinnan still wishes Frazier could have left Nebraska with three national championship rings.

"If that field goal goes through, they win," Kinnan said. "If the officials would have called roughing the kicker—which I saw—they might have lined up closer to kick it again and won. You never know. But I'm not big on looking back on what might have been."

There was unfinished business for Tommie Frazier and the Huskers. And they were not about to let the memory of the 1993s season get in the way of their goals in 1994.

At the same time, they would not forget the heartache of the Orange Bowl loss to Florida State, either.

THINGS FALL INTO PLACE, BUT SUDDENLY...

Expectations and hype were at Osborne-era highs in Lincoln when the 1994 season was set to kick off. While many correctly predicted the Huskers would be national champions, no one could have predicted the strange twists in the road that season.

"I knew heading into my junior year that we had a great team," Frazier said. "We knew that we had missed out on a great chance in the Orange Bowl."

The players decided to take full responsibility for coming up short in the Orange Bowl against Florida State. They would not blame anyone but themselves. Likewise, the Huskers knew they were the only ones who could erase that memory and put new memories in its place. The Huskers put "1:16" (one minute and 16 seconds) on the scoreboard at Memorial Stadium during each practice.

"There's been a lot of talk about the 1:16 that we put up on the scoreboard each practice," Tommie said. "That was a decision made by the team—the players. We did that as a team because against Florida State, when we scored to take the lead, there was 1:16 left on the clock. So in the fall entering the 1994 season, when we finished our practice, we ran for another 1:16 to make sure we always finished it off. We did not finish that last 1:16 in the Orange Bowl."

The Huskers believed even more strongly than the pollsters that they were the best team in the nation.

"I felt we had to go out and play well, and if we did, we would certainly contend for the national championship," Frazier said. "Losing to Florida State only made us hungrier—and upset for not

winning it the previous year. We knew we were capable of going all the way with the people we had coming back."

The season unfolded just as Frazier had thought—through the first three games, anyway. Frazier completed 8-of-16 passes for 100 yards and a touchdown, and ran for three touchdowns—including a 42-yarder—on the way to 130 yards on 12 carries as Nebraska hung up a goose egg with a 31-0 pasting of West Virginia in the Kickoff Classic. The following game, Frazier ran for 84 yards on 14 carries and threw for 88 yards as the Huskers slammed Texas Tech, 42-16. The third game of the season saw the Huskers hit high gear, mauling UCLA, 49-21.

The next week, things—and life for Tommie Frazier—would change. The pain behind his right knee had actually started during the week leading up to the Pacific game.

"It started getting worse as the week went on," Frazier said. "The day before the Pacific game, it was fine. Then I woke up the day of the Pacific game, and it hurt. The coaches did not want to play me. Coach Osborne had the doctors look me over. I told him it was sore, but I wanted to play. I played, we scored 14 points and Coach took me out."

Frazier played only nine plays at the beginning of what turned into a 70-21 rout of Pacific. Frazier felt a lot of pain in his right calf.

"I did not know I had a blood clot," Frazier said. "I don't even know what day it was that the pain had started. But the day after the Pacific game, a Sunday, I had it looked at. I had felt a tightness after the UCLA game in my leg, and it was sore. One day it was sore, and the next day it was fine. I thought it was a muscle pull, or I had bruised a muscle. The day after the Pacific game it really hurt. It is standard the day after games that players who were hurt or need treatment for an injury get looked at. I went to the emergency room. They scanned and found the blood clot."

Blood clots are not well understood among the public. There are varying degrees of seriousness. If the clot is in a smaller, surface vein, then it can often be addressed and treated immediately, with or without blood thinners. If it is a deeper clot in a bigger, wider vein,

it is much more serious. Frazier's first clot was in a small vein close to the surface.

"I had no idea what they were talking about when they said I had a blood clot," Frazier said. "I thought it was something they could take care of right there. I did not know the seriousness of the situation until they actually sat down and explained it to me."

While some news reports said the clot was life-threatening, the first one was not.

"Actually, it won't go to the heart and kill you as many people think," Frazier said. "If it breaks off, it can go to the lungs because as your veins go up your body, they get bigger."

The medical staff answered almost all of Frazier's questions. However, emotionally he was asking himself only more and more questions as the days and weeks went on.

"I was like, 'Why me?' " Frazier said. "I had done everything I was supposed to do. Yet it was something that had just happened."

Still, since the clot was in a small vein, the doctors simply dissolved the clot.

"I didn't know that this condition could affect my career," Frazier said. "They were telling me that they could dissolve it. I would have to sit out for a couple of weeks. With the off week, I thought I would be out three games—a total of four weeks—and then come back and play against Kansas State."

Frazier had just started to regain his focus and conditioning leading up to the Kansas State game. While Brook Berringer had stepped in and helped the Huskers past Wyoming in a scare, 42-32, and then a rout over Oklahoma State, 32-3, Frazier was ready to come back. But he first had to pass an examination of the leg.

"The Tuesday before the K-State game, I went in for a check-up, and the clot had come back," Frazier said.

This clot was not like the first one. While not in the biggest vein of the leg, it would simply not just go away.

"The doctor said my career could be over," Frazier said. "The team and coaches were in meetings while I was getting this news. The clot had come back and was more serious."

Frazier sat in disbelief, forgetting where he was for a few moments before a doctor came back into the room.

"The doctor asked if I wanted to call anyone. I called Coach Steele and told him what was going on, that I had learned I had another clot and my career could be over," Frazier said. "Coach Steele was speechless—it sounded like the phone had gone dead on the other end of the line."

Right away, Steele and Osborne came to the hospital.

"Coach Steele and Coach Osborne came down and the doctor explained that I had another clot," Frazier said. "The doctor told Coach Osborne that my career could be over. He said he would go in and cut the vein off and tie it off, and that I would probably be out the rest of the season. It was a superficial clot. It started out in a smaller vein, which is easier for the doctors to treat than if it was in a deeper vein."

Sitting in his hospital room while his teammates were at practice was tough.

"All four of us who were in the room felt something emotional as the doctor talked about surgery—you could see it in everyone's face," Frazier said. "There were plenty of days when I sat in my hospital room crying. I kept thinking, 'Why is this happening to me?' I wanted to leave school and just go home. My mom came up, and I told her I wanted to go home because I thought I couldn't play football any more."

Fans and well-wishers sent a few letters once the first clot was discovered. When the second clot was found, the mail flooded in.

"All the letters helped me get through that time," Frazier said. "I got get-well cards, thank you letters—I even got love letters. It meant so much that people still cared about me when I was not even on the field. The letters that meant the most were the ones from children and the ones from senior citizens, and the ones from people who had problems of their own. It really gave me both perspective and inspiration."

Frazier's mother traveled to Lincoln when the second clot was discovered.

"When he was in the hospital the first time," Priscilla said, "I talked to him on the phone and asked, 'Are you all right?' He said, 'Everything's fine; you don't need to come up here.' I saw on television a couple of days later that he had been released from the hospital, and I felt a lot better. A week or two later, he was back in the hospital. That's when my heart sank. I said, 'Tommie, I'm coming out there.' He said that was good, that he wanted me to. The day I got there, he had been calling everyone at the airport and at the hospital asking, 'Is my mom here yet?' He was just boo-hoo crying like a little baby. He was laying in the bed and kept calling, 'Is my mom here yet? What time is the plane landing?' One of the coaches told him, 'She'll be here; she's coming.'"

His mother said she had never seen her son as down as he was when she visited him that day in the hospital.

"When I walked in the hospital room, his eyes just lit up," she said.

From there, Priscilla tried to figure out how to get closer to Tommie because a lot of monitor equipment was blocking her from her son.

"I can't ask how you are doing since you have all those tubes," she told Tommie. "I can't give you a hug because I don't know where to hug you with tubes everywhere."

She reached out and touched Tommie the only place she could.

"I just rubbed his forehead," she said. "His eyes were so watery. He wouldn't let me out of his sight. He said, 'When you have to sleep, you can sleep sitting there in the chair.' When he woke up, he was facing the other way. He quickly turned and looked to make sure I was still there. Of course, I was."

Osborne was a regular visitor, setting aside time to sit with Tommie in Frazier's hospital room.

"That's the thing about Coach Osborne: He is always on your side, whether you will play football again for him or not," Frazier said. "He came up to see me every day—on the few exceptions he did not, he still called to check on me to let me know how practice was going and assure me that he would be up the next day. I don't

know that a lot of coaches would have done that. It only reinforced my belief that I made the right choice—the only choice—when I signed to come to the University of Nebraska.”

Frazier’s mother appreciated Osborne’s extra effort with her son.

“Coach Osborne was so supportive,” she said. “I would call the hospital to check on Tommie, and Coach Osborne was often there in the hospital room. When Tommie was in the hospital, Coach Osborne took time out to see Tommie every day. A lot of other coaches just would not have that time; they’d have other things to do. Coach Osborne made a special effort to boost Tommie’s spirits.”

Osborne’s sincerity about caring for players knew no bounds, as demonstrated that year when an opposing player was injured and hospitalized.

“Another thing that inspired me that year was when one of the visiting teams had a player hurt,” Priscilla said. “One of the guys on the other team was knocked unconscious and jammed a vertebrae in his neck. He was paralyzed for a while. He ended up right down the hall from where Tommie was in the hospital. His coach didn’t come to see him. They sent their trainer, and their coach went back home with the other boys. That really upset me. That’s why I’m so thankful that my son had a coach like Tom Osborne. Coach Osborne came up to see the other team’s player to make sure he would be all right and sat and talked with him. Tommie went down and visited with the young man, too. Fortunately, the boy was all right, and the next day he was transferred back to his college.”

“Coach Osborne and Coach Steele also promised me they would keep me informed,” Priscilla said. “They kept their word. I never—not even one time—had to question their word.”

Coach Osborne said the questions Frazier asked during that difficult time made sense.

“I think it was the nature of his injury, and the severity of it,” Osborne said. “It was something that came out of the blue. Nobody knew quite what caused it. If it wasn’t life-threatening, it was at least career-threatening. All of us were concerned about him. I think it is only natural to stay close to someone going through something like

that. If there was a position that I dealt with a lot, it was the quarterbacks—as well as Turner Gill, our quarterback coach. I got to know Tommie, Brook and the other quarterbacks very well because I had spent a huge amount of time with them.”

While he knew he could not play, Frazier could not wait to see his team in action.

“I watched the games from the sideline when I was out, but I had to watch the Oklahoma State game on television because I was in the hospital,” Frazier said. “It was easier to watch the games in person because I was around the players. Watching the game from the hospital was much harder.”

Steele still reflects on those hospital visits.

“Because I had gotten so close to Tommie, it wasn’t recruit-recruiter, coach-player relationship after a while,” Steele said. “I consider Tommie Frazier a close friend. We had a good relationship. So seeing him hurt was the hardest thing I’ve ever been through. I could do nothing but offer support and love and then watch as the very thing that he enjoyed the most was taken away from him in an instant. He wasn’t given a lot of hope in terms of the clot not returning. You could see the pain in his face.”

That pain turned into determination.

“The guy bounced back daily,” Steele said. “There were times during the morning or night when he would get so distraught over the situation because that was the first thing that had ever happened in his life that he couldn’t control.”

BERRINGER KEEPS TITLE HOPES ALIVE

Contrary to media reports, Frazier and Brook Berringer did not have an ongoing feud. Rather, since both were vying for the same position, there was a competition—and a very healthy one at that.

Frazier did not answer questions from the media about the Huskers while he was hurt because he felt that the focus should be on the Huskers who played, not the one who did not.

“Brook Berringer stepped in and did a great job that season,” Frazier said. “After the Colorado game, a reporter asked me to grade Brook. I said I’d give him an A, that he did great. But then, the rest of the media came over. I didn’t say anything, so it came out that I had no comment. But that wasn’t the case. I just did not want the focus on me because I didn’t play. Let the guys who went out there and played a great game in the win over Colorado get the credit and enjoy the moment because they deserved it.”

Frazier said he and Berringer never socialized, but that was not uncommon. During Frazier’s entire four years as a Husker, he had only a handful of teammates that he developed friendships with off the field.

“Brook and I weren’t buddy-buddy, but it wasn’t like we weren’t friends,” Frazier said. “What bothered me when the media portrayed me and Brook as enemies was they did not research the article. Brook and I spoke often in practice. Anyone on the team could tell you we did not hang out off the field. But on the field, we worked together to help the team win. There were a lot of guys on the team whom I did not hang out with off the field. In fact, I only had two or three teammates who I did things with off the field.”

The man who spent the most time with both during the week—

Turner Gill—was surprised to see the media make a big deal out of the fact that Berringer and Frazier did not socialize.

"Absolutely, Brook and Tommie were always having conversations," Gill said. "Just because you don't hang out with 100-plus teammates doesn't mean you don't like them. It just means you have different personalities. I can remember so many times—almost daily—when Tommie and Brook were trying to help each other out talking about audibles and making reads. You know, it's the same way on the coaching staff here; there are some coaches who I spend a lot of time with, who come over to my house and that kind of thing. And there are others I don't do anything with outside of work. But I have good working relationships with all of them. You know, I could not have asked for anything more out of Tommie and Brook as far as how well they worked together. They were together four or five hours a day almost every day and always stayed very cordial. I dealt with them as much as anyone, and I always saw how they respected each other."

Former Husker center Aaron Graham, now with the Arizona Cardinals, said the relationship between Berringer and Frazier created a "competitive tension," but that the relationship was, in fact, based on a mutual respect.

"What people don't understand about Brook's and Tommie's relationship is that they weren't sitting back saying, 'OK, you go ahead and take the starting job because you are better than me, and I will support you and just watch,' " Graham said. "These were two guys competing for the job of quarterbacking the best team in the nation. When you have that kind of situation, there is going to be competitive tension because you are trying to beat someone out and win something. At the same time, I knew what was written about them wasn't true because I know both of those guys had a ton of respect for each other. I saw how they interacted on a daily basis."

What Frazier and Berringer did have in common was something important: Both wanted to see the Huskers give Coach Tom Osborne his first national championship.

"Brook and I understood each other, and we got along," Frazier

said. "Once practice was over, he went home and I went home. We did not call each other to do things together. We grew up in two very different environments and lifestyles. Some people took offense to it. But the media made it more than it was. That one article in *Sports Illustrated* generated so much talk. There were 150 guys on the team, I didn't hang out with 145 of them off the field. No one asked me to comment on those guys. Brook and I talked quite a bit before the Wyoming game."

Frazier remembers Berringer's poise and confidence.

"It's my first start, what did you do before your first start?" Brook asked. "What are the things I should look for?"

Frazier told Berringer what Grant and Gill had told Tommie before his first start.

"You go out there and don't try to be a single-man show," Frazier told Berringer. "You have 10 other guys out there. Lean on them. If you make a mistake, they can pick it up. Just do your job and take more of the lead as you get comfortable."

When Berringer came through in flying colors, Frazier enjoyed more than one big smile over it. Berringer had put in the reps in practice and was popular with his teammates. Frazier knew the success could not have happened to a nicer, more team-oriented player than Berringer.

"I never resented Brook's success at all. I was as happy as anyone about it," Frazier said. "The press made it seem like, when I was injured, Nebraska could not win the championship. I was very happy for the team and Brook. By Brook playing the way he did, it erased a lot of doubts that had come up when I went down. Brook showed that he was a good leader and a good player. The success the team continued when I was out spoke a lot for the other players, too, and how good they were."

While some reports criticized Frazier for spending time alone during the rest of the regular season, he respected Berringer enough to know that for now, the Huskers were Brook's team. Frazier did not want to take away from either that fact or the team's focus as the final few games of the season loomed larger in importance.

"I kind of stayed away from the team the rest of the season," Frazier said. "It was good for me to stay away because it kept my mind off of all the other things. It would have been hard to stand on the sidelines during practice. I would go out to practice occasionally, and the guys would come over and ask how I was doing."

Still, the visitors kept coming to the hospital.

"I had people come see me in the hospital every day," Frazier said. "I had people up there from the time they got out of practice until 11 p.m. at night."

While Frazier missed the team, the Huskers also missed him.

"That was tough for all of us," Graham said. "We knew the importance of having Tommie out there on the field. It was definitely a different team without him. Each member of the coaching staff came by at least once a week.

"That really helped me to know that even though I wasn't out there helping the team, they still cared about me,"

As Frazier's spirits started to improve, so did his health. Soon it appeared he might be able to return to practice in time for Orange Bowl preparations.

"After the Oklahoma game, it looked like I might get medical clearance to come back," Frazier said. "Coach Osborne said I should start coming to meetings. The more I went to meetings, the more I started hanging around the team again. What had happened was that I just had to stay away for a while and ease my way back in, and take it from there."

Like a snap from center on an option play, Frazier did just that—he took it from there, and ran with it.

His oldest brother, Carlton Frazier, never doubted that Tommie would return.

"I knew if there was a way to come back," Carlton said, "he'd prove to everyone that he could play,"

COMEBACK IN THE ORANGE BOWL

Media coverage and public perception of Frazier's return were mixed. To Frazier, the debate over whether he or Berringer should start was senseless. Besides, the system of deciding who would start was not going to change just for the bowl game. That is, whoever played better in practice would start, just like it always was.

"For the bowl game, it wasn't like I wanted to start," Frazier said. "I even told Coach Gill that I did not want to take away from what the team was doing, or become a distraction. I told him that I know that Coach Osborne has a policy of not losing your position because of injury, but if Brook is the better man, let him play. After all, he played more of the season than I had."

Frazier already had what he wanted: Another opportunity to play the sport he loved.

"All I wanted was to show them that if I was good enough to play, play me," Frazier said. "If not, play Brook. It was not that big of an issue, even though it was made out to be. Brook and I still talked during practice. What made Brook a good quarterback was that he knew the system. He knew what we had to accomplish, and he knew how to use what he did best. He had good speed and a great arm. He was a heady player. He knew the audibles and all that. When you have that going for you, you are going to be successful."

While teammates and coaches marveled at how Frazier did not appear to have lost a step despite the prolonged absence, Frazier saw himself in a different light.

"People were saying how I came back and didn't miss a beat," Frazier said. "But that wasn't true. Not at all. I had lost a step, and I was far from being in shape."

The Huskers were ready to pounce on another opportunity to win Osborne his first national championship. However, there was still a lot of discussion about the quarterback situation.

"The team was still focused," Frazier said. "The big issue was beating Miami. The team itself, as far as the quarterback situation was concerned, was split. Some felt I had been hurt, so I should be allowed back. Some thought since Brook had done such a great job, that he should keep the job. It wasn't that bad, but being around them, you could hear some players saying, 'Tommie should start,' or 'Brook should start.' But everyone knew that Coach would make the decision."

Once Osborne was ready to announce his decision as to who would start, the team was poised to move forward again.

"Coach Osborne made it clear that his decision, whatever it was, would be final," Frazier said. "There would be no debate at all about it."

Osborne tabbed Frazier the starter. According to Frazier, it was literally a neck-and-neck race between himself and Berringer to the wire, with Frazier winning by perhaps a nose.

"The only reason I started the Orange Bowl was because I had two fewer turnovers in practice than Brook," Frazier said. "Everything else was equal. I was selected to start. I didn't feel sorry for Brook, and he didn't want me to either, because it is like a business. It was close, but I graded out just a bit higher."

Throughout the week, Frazier was having dreams about the game. Not just about the Orange Bowl and all the fans, but about the game itself. He started talking to teammates about it and then dreamed it again the following night. At that point, Frazier honestly believed that is how the game would unfold.

"The whole story about me saying that I would come in and lead the team to victory in the fourth quarter started on Thursday," Frazier said. "We were riding a bus to practice, and I told Damon Benning that I had a dream that I had come in during the fourth quarter against Miami and we won. Damon laughed and said, 'You're crazy. You are making that up.' I said that I really did have

the dream. During the game, I was standing next to Abdul Muhammad. I said that I was going to make a big impact this game, in the fourth quarter. Abdul just kind of looked at me."

Frazier and Berringer were both impressive, yet each showed signs of struggle at times. Many in the press thought Osborne was pulling the quarterbacks arbitrarily, which was not the case.

"The thing about the game that no one really understood was when Coach Osborne switched quarterbacks," Frazier said. "It was set up before the game started. People thought Coach Osborne pulled me because of the interception I threw. That play was not even a factor. He pulled me because he had told Brook and myself that I would play the first quarter and Brook would play the second quarter, and we'd see who was running things better in the second half."

Halftime was one of the greatest moments in Husker history. Osborne stood up and declared that the Huskers, trailing 10-7 at halftime, would win if they kept playing hard. Osborne said that Miami would tire and the constant pounding from the Husker offensive line would take a toll on the Hurricanes. Osborne said the exhaustion would lead to frustration, which would lead to the 'Canes taking a stupid penalty.

"All the stories you have heard or seen about Coach Osborne's halftime speech that day are something for the ages," Frazier said. "Everything he said would happen, did. He predicted a big penalty that would hurt them, and sure enough, a personal foul deep in their territory hurt them. He said they would be fired up and might even score on their first possession of the second half, which they did, but we would still win as long as we kept executing and stayed focused."

Likewise, Frazier believed the Huskers would win. He still believed his dream would come true, but he knew that Berringer had earned the right to play just as much as he had, so Frazier decided to just see how things went.

"I didn't know if I was going to play in the second half, or how much," Frazier said. "I just did not know. But I had confidence in myself that, if called upon, I'd go out and get the job done."

Osborne looked toward Frazier with the game on the line. Talking into his headset, Osborne told the coaches listening that he wanted Frazier in the game because of a gut feeling that Frazier would "make something happen."

"Coach Gill came over and asked me how I was doing and feeling, and I told him that I felt fine," Frazier said. "I could tell I was going to get the chance."

Just as Osborne's halftime speech was ringing true, Frazier's dream became Miami's nightmare in the fourth quarter. Frazier ripped off a 25-yard run to keep a fourth-quarter drive going.

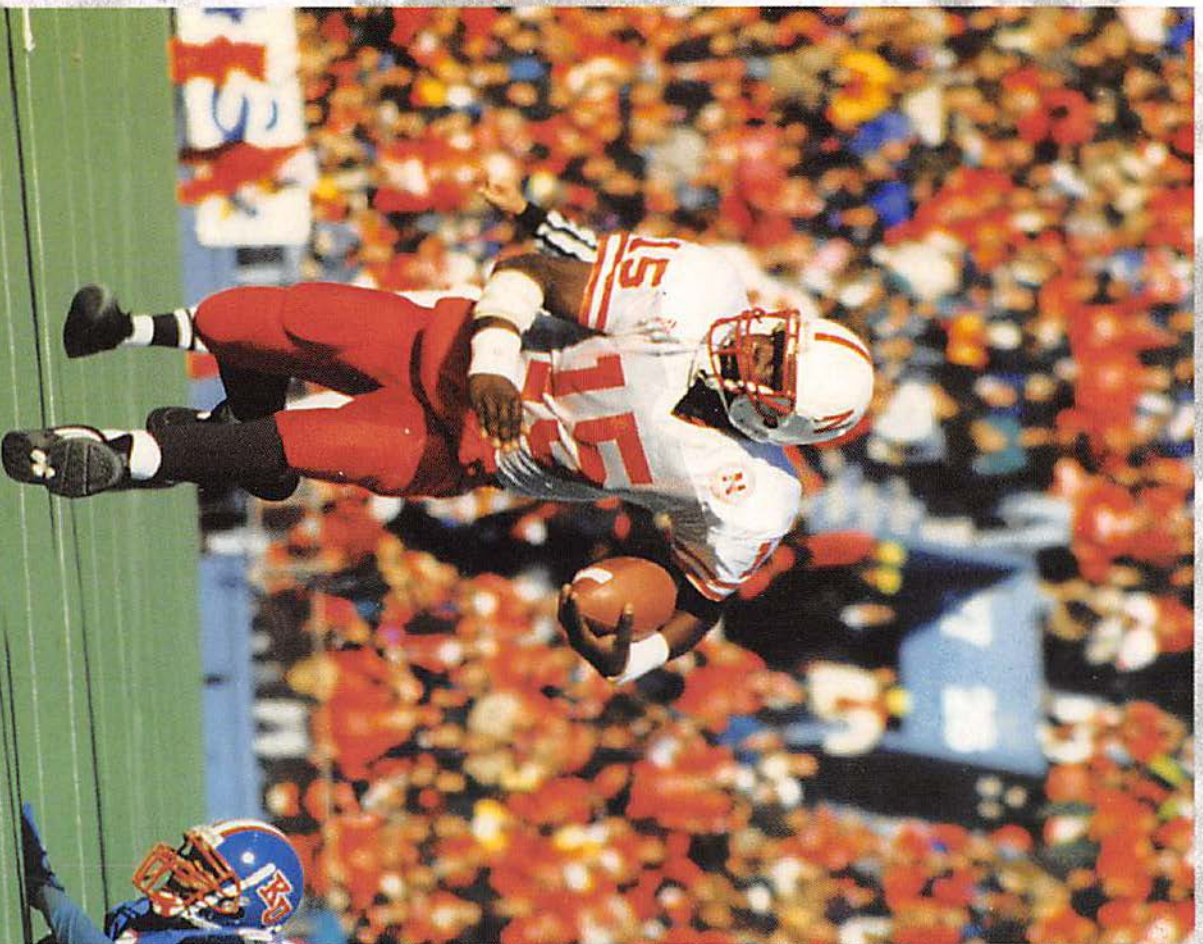
"The second half of that game worked out well," Frazier said. "I had gained 15 pounds and lost some speed while I was out. But as far as what was in my mind, knowing the plays and making reads, I had lost nothing. My train of thought and the thought process were fine. But physically, I was slower. Like the 25-yard run in the second half; had I been healthy, that guy never would have caught me."

When Frazier came out to start the drive that would culminate with the first of two touchdown runs in the fourth quarter by Cory Schlesinger, Frazier exuded even more confidence than usual.

"I walked into the huddle and said, 'OK, we've got them where we want them. We have to score and tie the game up. If we're going to win this game, we have to go down and score.' The guys just looked at me, and their eyes got big," Frazier said. "That wasn't the Tommie Frazier they knew. Usually when we needed a score, people would tense up, so I would go out and try to say something funny. But I saw in their eyes that it was not time for something funny. They needed something to fire them up. We had been playing hard the whole game, and we were still trailing—we hadn't really made a dent in them."

While Frazier and Schlesinger got a lot of much-deserved credit for the two second-half scores, Frazier said he believes the offensive line at the time—the "Pipeline"—should forever be known as the best offensive line in college football history.

"The line still deserves the credit," Frazier said. "I was really spoiled with that offensive line—you will never hear too many

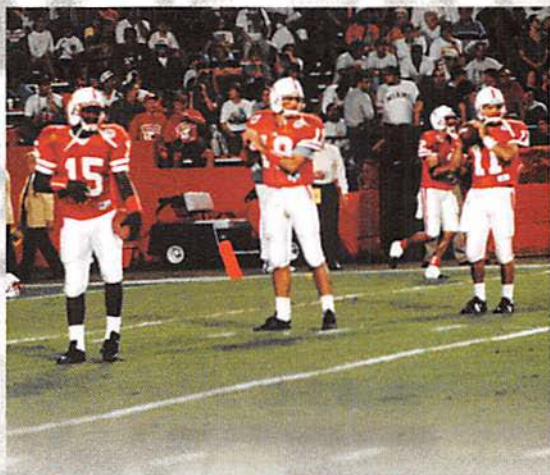


Great blocking leaves Frazier with plenty of open field against Kansas in 1995.



Tommie Frazier in youth leagues.

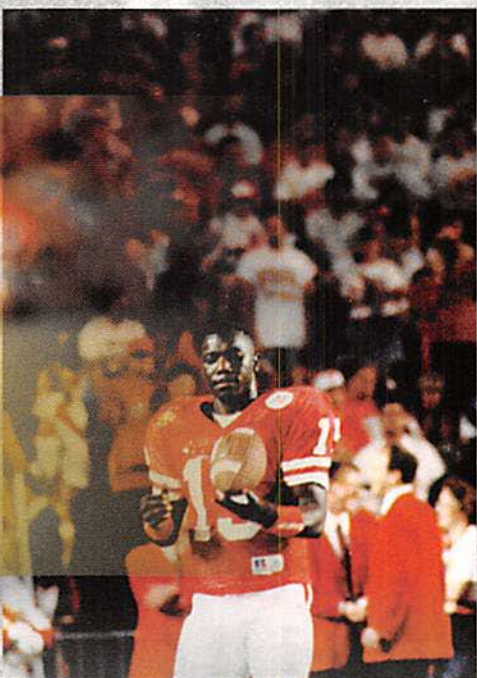
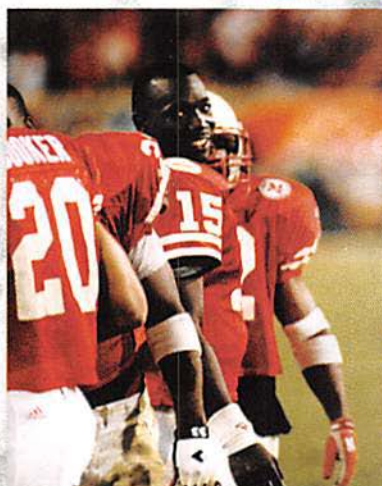
The quarterback trio
of Tommie Frazier (15),
Brook Berringer (18),
and Matt Turman (11)
warm up before
a game.



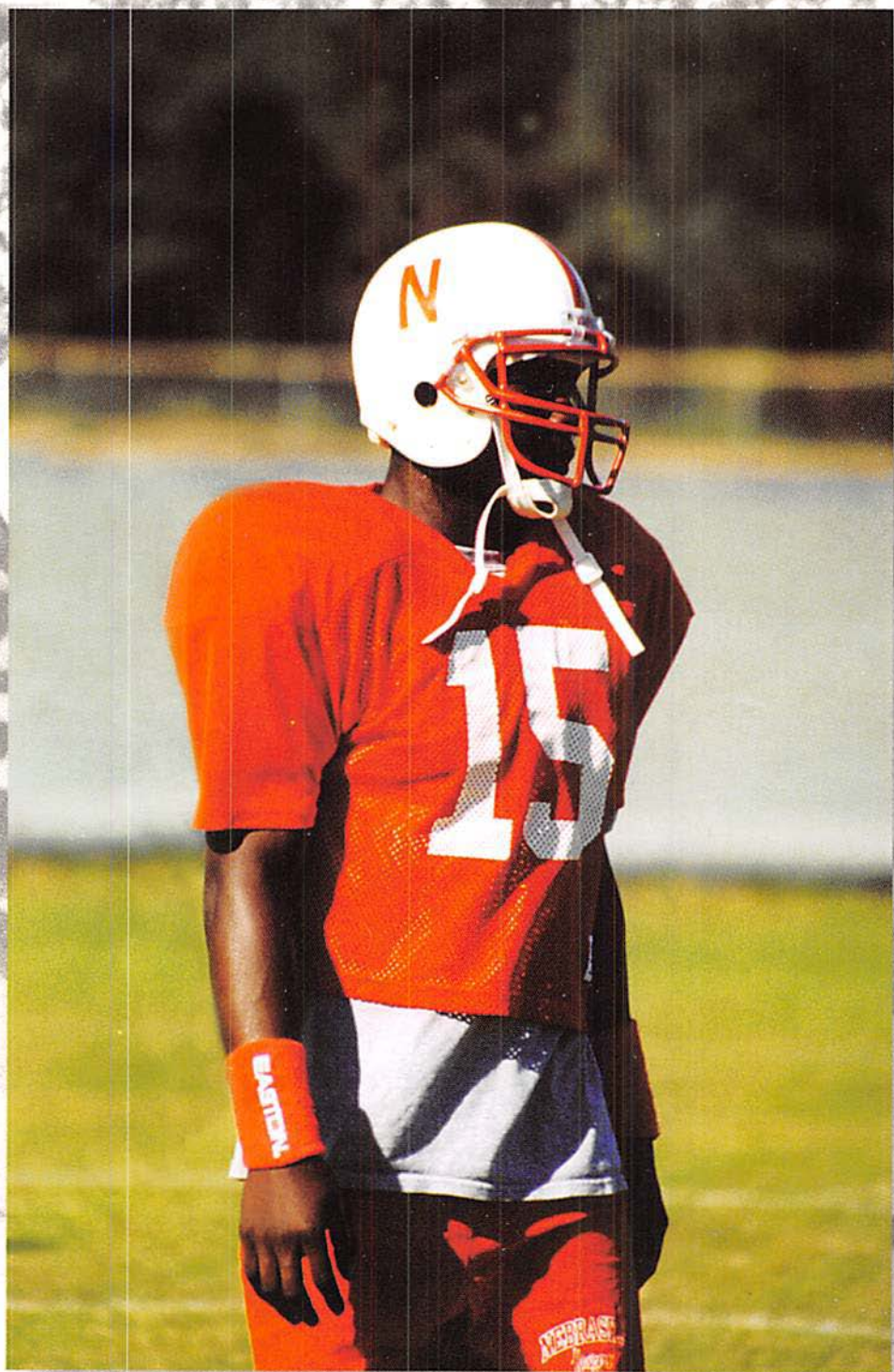
Few
defenders
could catch
the elusive
Frazier in
the open
field.



Tommie Frazier breaks loose for a 70 yard dash after the offense holds back the opposition.



Tommie was the ESPY winner for the 1995 College Football Play of the Year.



players saying that. They were quick on their feet, and they were just as quick mentally; if one of them ever made a mistake, another would sense it and do whatever it took to make up for it. I loved talking about that line and seeing them get the credit. Those guys got a lot of ink, and they deserved it."

A player Frazier remembered well from high school—Warren Sapp—was now playing for Miami. Sapp, who would go on to become an All-Pro for the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, looked like all he wanted was an oxygen tank as the Huskers beat down the All-American defensive tackle in the second half. While Sapp didn't have enough air filling his lungs to make any plays in the second half, he found some to mouth off to Frazier when Frazier re-entered the game in the fourth quarter.

"Warren Sapp was talking trash that game," said Frazier. "He talks a lot of trash, but he does back it up—I like Warren. I came back in the game, and Warren said, 'Thomas, where you been?' That made me mad—I don't like being called Thomas because that's not my name. So I said, 'Don't ask me where I've been, ask me where I'm going to go.'"

A stunned Sapp got the answer a couple of plays later when Frazier blew by him for the 25-yard run. The Huskers scored twice, and any other questions Sapp might have had for Tommie—not Thomas, mind you—could have been answered by a quick peek at the scoreboard.

"It was a pretty tremendous performance by Tommie," Gill said. "Of course, he was back before the actual game itself. Still, we worried that since he had been in the hospital, he might not be as sharp. Really, it was like he didn't miss a beat at all. He brings something to the game that you cannot explain, or teach people to do. God has given him a great talent as an athlete."

After Schlesinger's first touchdown run to tie the score at 17-17, Frazier and his teammates became sharks, smelling the blood and making plans for a quick kill on their next possession.

"Once we tied the game up, I knew we were going to win," Frazier said. "That took all the fight out of them. To go down and

score just took the life out of Miami. The whole momentum of that game had changed."

Frazier did not know until after the game that Osborne had turned to him on instinct.

"I heard about how Coach Osborne told the other coaches during the second half that he wanted me in there," Frazier said. "That made me feel good, that he wanted me in there with the game on the line."

Graham called the game a "defining moment" in Frazier's career.

"It showed a lot of what Tommie is about—that he could miss practically the entire season," Graham said, "and then come back and not just play, but play in the biggest game of the year—and the biggest game in college football that season because it was for the national championship—and lead us to the win, the national title, and then gain Orange Bowl MVP honors again. You have to remember that he only practiced maybe 10-12 times leading up to that game."

Tyrone Williams said Frazier showed, even in a limited role, that he could affect, and control, the outcome of a game.

"He really silenced his critics in the Orange Bowl against Miami," Williams said. "He had gone through all that stuff, and he only got to play maybe half the Orange Bowl. But in the time he did play, he took over the game."

A lot of monkeys were slain that night: Osborne had a national title, and Frazier's burden of dealing with the uncertainty that had followed him throughout the season was gone.

"It meant a lot to me that we had taken a burden off of Coach Osborne by winning a national championship," Frazier said. "However, I really expected nothing less. When I signed my letter-of-intent to come here, my goal was to win a national championship. At the same time, it felt good to help give him something that he had not had before."

People asked Frazier what he and Osborne said to each other after the game. Those questions picked up after *Sports Illustrated* ran a story about how Frazier got on the team bus outside the Orange

Bowl and walked past Osborne, with barely a peep passing between the two.

"I remember getting on the bus after the game. I walked past Coach Osborne and he said, 'Good game,' and I nodded and said, 'Thank you,'" Frazier said. "Coach Osborne and I never talked about that game again. It was time to move on. So we did."

That two people who had accomplished so much in the previous hours could pass each other leaving the stadium without saying more than two words each surprised some people—but not Frazier.

"The funny thing was, not much more than an hour had passed since we had won the national championship when I saw Coach on the bus," Frazier said. "People don't realize that when you win a championship, at that moment on the field, it is great. But as you leave the locker room, you are already thinking about next year. Also, winning the title does not really sink in until later. Plus, we were all tired after that game, and the week leading up to it."

When Frazier did reflect on that season, he was amazed at the number of memories, and the full gamut of emotions those memories evoked: Opening the season as the entrenched starter to the first clot, getting ready for the K-State game, then undergoing surgery, coming back for the Orange Bowl uncertain as to whether he would play, helping earn Osborne his first national championship and being named the game's Most Valuable Player—for the second year in a row.

"I learned a lot about myself that season," Frazier said. "I learned that I could overcome anything. But I also learned to take nothing for granted and that it can all end at any moment. In football, you are one play away from it ending. In baseball, you could be one wild pitch away from your career ending. You don't plan your life around sports because one injury could end it all."

TOMMIE FRAZIER, 1995 ORANGE BOWL MVP

This story, written by Bob Schaller, appeared in the Scottsbluff *Star-Herald* after Nebraska beat Miami, 24-17, in the 1995 Orange Bowl to win the 1994 National Championship:

It was medical mumbo-jumbo for more than two months.

It was the emptiness of standing on the sidelines or lying in a hospital bed watching the army keep marching in perfect stride, even with the field general not leading the team into battle.

But when all was said and done, Nebraska quarterback Tommie Frazier had the last word—did some of you sense that he might?—earning Orange Bowl Most Valuable Player honors for the second year in a row. Frazier guided the No. 1-ranked Huskers to a pair of fourth-quarter scores and a 24-17 win over No. 3-ranked Miami Sunday night.

“It was a gut feeling,” Nebraska coach Tom Osborne said of his decision to play Frazier instead of Brook Berringer in the fourth quarter. “Frazier is a special athlete. He makes things happen.”

Berringer made things happen all season long, playing near flawlessly to keep NU's title hopes alive.

Sunday night, it was Frazier making things happen. He ran for 25 yards on third down and four to set up a touchdown. And he exorcised another of Osborne's demons when he completed a two-point conversion pass to Eric Alford in the same end zone where Turner Gill's two-point conversion pass to Jeff Smith fell incomplete in the 1984 Orange Bowl, costing the Huskers a national championship against...you guessed it, Miami.

There was little doubt who the better team was when the final gun sounded Sunday night.

"They made the plays. They ran the football," said Miami coach Dennis Erickson. "They came out when they had to—ran the football and the option at the end to make some plays."

"They" was mostly "him"—as in Frazier. According to Husker running back Damon Benning, Frazier made a Joe Namath-like proclamation during Tuesday's Orange Bowl practice.

"Tommie said all week that he was going to come in during the fourth quarter and win it for us," Benning said. "It doesn't matter whether you start the game; it's if you finish. Tommie finished for us tonight."

Benning said it wasn't how Frazier did it—it was when Frazier did it.

"He made all the pieces of the puzzle fit together at the right time," Benning said. "With Tommie playing like that, we expected to win."

Husker running back Clinton Childs said Frazier's play proved something else.

"On every play up to the end," Childs said, "Tommie came through."

Nebraska offensive guard Brenden Stai said the Huskers might have been able to pull it off without Frazier—but he was glad they didn't have to try.

"Tommie is awesome," Stai said. "This is a dream come true for him."

This story, written by Bob Schaller, appeared in the *Scottsbluff Star-Herald* after Nebraska beat Miami, 24-17, in the 1995 Orange Bowl to win the 1994 National Championship:

Those who love good arguments must have found plenty of fodder during Nebraska's quarterback "controversy" Sunday night in the Orange Bowl.

The doctor—Dr. Tom—made the diagnosis in this case. And Nebraska coach Tom Osborne's decision to go with Tommie Frazier in the fourth quarter paid off with two final-period scores and a 24-17 win over No. 3-ranked Miami.

Frazier was the starter against Miami, but completed only one of three passes and had an interception—which Miami promptly turned into a touchdown just two minutes later.

Brook Berringer, who took over for Frazier after the Pacific game, started the second quarter, as planned, Sunday night.

Was it the right decision? Berringer made the decision look smart on his second series when he hit Mark Gilman with a 19-yard touchdown pass.

"I have to take my hat off to Brook, he played well," said Frazier, who was the MVP after guiding Nebraska to two late touchdowns, the first to tie the game and the second to win it.

"Both quarterbacks contributed to the win," Osborne said. "Brook did some good things."

Could Frazier, arguably stale and not in top-game condition, have done more against the quick Miami defensive line?

"I was always keeping myself warm," Frazier said. "I have a bad cold. But Coach felt it was time to go to me in the fourth quarter."

Make no mistake: Berringer earned his stripes during the season. He was cool-hand Luke when the Huskers had key shootouts with Kansas State, Colorado and Oklahoma, games that stood in the way of a perfect regular season and even the opportunity to be playing for the national championship in the Orange Bowl against Miami.

Without Berringer, the Huskers would have been talking about bowls like Fiesta or Sugar or—clench your teeth—even the Carquest or Alamo.

The media, which are to controversy what gasoline is to cars, came out of the woodwork to lambaste Osborne's decision to start Frazier, even though Frazier lost his starting job not due to performance, but instead from a little-understood clotting anomaly.

Remember, "Tommie Frazier" was synonymous with "Heisman hype" when the media made its annual rush to hand out the Heisman before the season even began.

Osborne will be second-guessed to no end. But when you have only A and B as answers on a true-false test, finding the right answer is somewhat difficult.

TOUCHDOWN TOMMIE

And the bottom line ends with "W"—as in win.

"I just felt," Osborne said, "like it was time for Tommie."

REPEAT PLANS RAILROADED BY PHILLIPS?

After giving Coach Tom Osborne his first national championship, the Huskers were ranked near, or at the top of most polls heading into the 1995 season.

However, the road to the title in 1995 would be as unlikely—and unpredictable—as it had been in 1994. No one could have—or would have wanted to—envision what lay ahead for the Huskers, especially off the field, as the 1995 season got underway.

“In 1995 the hype was starting early,” Frazier said. “But we had already started preparing for the season. In fact, only a week or so after the national title game, the players weren’t even talking about the national championship we had just won—we were all looking toward the 1995 season and winning another national championship.”

On the field, the loss of four of five starting offensive linemen from the “Pipeline” of 1994 raised a lot of questions.

“Offensively, I knew that was the best team I would ever be a part of,” Frazier said. “We had so many weapons. We had receivers who could catch, linemen who could pull block or pass protect, and backs who could run around, past or over you. That line was good. Much had been written about a possible drop-off in the offensive line because we lost four of the five starters from the first national championship team. What many folks didn’t realize was that several of the guys who started on the 1995 team had played almost as much as a lot of starters during the 1994 season.”

Tommie Frazier had some answers of his own. He felt like he had something to prove because of the time he lost during the 1994 season.

“After spring ball, I knew I had a pretty good chance to be the

starter because I was playing as well as I ever had," Frazier said. "I knew that if I was at the top of my game, anyone would have a hard time pushing me out. Part of the hunger that pushed me was what had happened the previous season. I felt like some people were judging that I had only had one good quarter—in the Orange Bowl. Aside from that, my season was a wash. I knew that in some people's minds there was a lot of doubt whether I would ever come all the way back to where I had been before the clots, and if I could become an even better player."

The 1995 team ended up meeting—and exceeding—just about anyone's expectations on the field.

"It makes me feel good to hear people say that the 1995 team was the best in Nebraska history and even college football history," Frazier said. "But no one will ever know if that is true or not. I felt like we had a team that could not be beat. But the best in history? That's awfully hard to judge. We knew what we wanted to accomplish, and we went out and did it."

However, before the season even started, a newspaper requested phone records from the university and for several players. Driving records were also sought by media outlets. Even Osborne sensed the Huskers were going to be analyzed inside and out. "I don't imagine that's headed anywhere positive," Osborne said of the media requests for phone and driving records.

"We knew that the media had us in a fish bowl this season," Frazier said. "Being the defending champion, we knew people would look at us closer than ever before, and that everything we did would be scrutinized to the highest possible level."

The scores—even against highly regarded and ranked teams—were lopsided. Michigan State hosted the Huskers as a highly touted team, but fell, 50-10. The night the Huskers got back from East Lansing, Michigan, Frazier was hanging out with Lawrence Phillips and several other teammates and friends.

"I had just left Lawrence right before he found out that his girlfriend was at a teammate's apartment," Frazier said. "Ed Stewart's girlfriend was there, so was Damon Benning and Clinton

Childs, we had just been winding down after the game, having fun, listening to music, watching TV and talking. Clinton and Damon were really close to Lawrence.

"I had no idea anything would go wrong. It was after midnight when I left," Frazier said. "A girl called me when I had just gotten home and said Lawrence was going over to a guy's house because the guy—and I didn't know who it was yet—was with Lawrence's girlfriend. As most of the country would later learn, Lawrence lost his temper and got into a fight with the girl.

"I had seen Lawrence get upset before," Frazier continued. "It's like they say, you can take a kid out of a certain environment, but you can't take that environment out of the kid. Every so often, something sets them off to remind them of their past."

We supported whatever decision Coach Osborne made regarding the incident because we knew he had the best interest of Lawrence and (the victim) in mind. Coach Osborne took a lot of grief for letting Lawrence back on the field."

After the team voted to suspend Lawrence for one game, Osborne let the players tell him how they felt about the Phillips' incident.

"Coach Osborne said he understood how we felt, and he respected our input and thoughts," Frazier said. "At the same time, he told us, 'In this matter, the final decision will be mine, not yours.' He and Lawrence had talked about certain things, and Lawrence had agreed to go through the counseling Coach Osborne set up."

"The role that I had on the team was to be a mediator," Frazier said. "I had to be a guy who listened to both sides and get everyone on the same page. We were going through a lot of things. Damon Benning had an incident like the next day or a few days later—it was on national TV and in all the papers, although it should be pointed out that Damon was cleared of any wrongdoing. It was just a matter of saying, we have to keep our focus and not forget that our main goal is a national championship. We had to forget about what the media was saying about it."

Gill said the team knew after watching what Frazier went

through the previous year that he would not let himself or the Huskers be distracted by the off-the-field matters.

"It goes back to what he had faced over time, from coming in and playing as a freshman to what he went through with the blood clots as a junior," Gill said. "Over time, more and more people were believing in him. They saw that he was a hard worker, that he would stand up for himself and for his teammates. He did all those things and gained respect. Each of us has to earn respect. When everyone saw how he handled being in the hospital his junior year during the season, the players and coaches knew it took a lot of heart and courage to come back. He had stared adversity in the eye and never blinked."

Coach Osborne said Frazier executed his role off the field as well as he did on the field during that rough period.

"Tommie provided good leadership," Osborne said. "He led by example. He played and practiced very competitively. He didn't like sub-par efforts, even in practice. That was a year of distractions. It could have fragmented the team. But they pulled together. As a group, they got tighter and tighter, and as more people hammered on us, they grew closer. Tommie did a great job."

Center Aaron Graham saw the already intense Frazier crank up the focus another notch.

"He did a great job, especially during that time," Graham said. "There was nothing that could take his focus away from what we were trying to do. I really appreciated Tommie—he was a man on a mission."

Tyrone Williams also noted Frazier's amazing focus that season.

"Coming back the next year was strictly professional as far as Tommie was concerned," Williams said. "Not for anything he said in the locker room, practice or games—Tommie's not a rah-rah type. He saw where he had to really buckle the team down so we'd keep focused. He wouldn't let there be any jiving around. He made sure everyone worked hard to prepare for the games. When we'd get up 14 points, guys would feel like they could relax, but Tommie really made sure we always finished the game."

Frazier wanted to win—this time, for Osborne.

"Coach Osborne had taken a lot of hits," Frazier said. "At that point, we decided we would win a national championship for Coach Osborne and for the way he always supports and loves us. We needed to support and love Coach Osborne."

Arizona State, a team that would not only contend for the national title the following year, but actually shut out the Huskers in 1996—was no match in 1995, falling 77-28.

"After the Arizona State game in the locker room, we gave Coach Osborne the game ball and dedicated the game to him," Frazier said. "We wanted everyone to know that no matter what was said or printed, that this team was real, and nothing could take our minds off of what we were going to accomplish."

Washington State, with the top-ranked defense in the nation, fell 35-21. Kansas State, ranked No. 8 in the nation at the time, fell by 24 points, 49-25.

Colorado, a pre-season national championship contender was humiliated 44-21 by Frazier and the Huskers in Boulder.

"It all came back to the goal we set at the beginning of the season," Frazier said of the 1995 team's incredible focus on the field. "Of course, we kept Lawrence in our thoughts and hoped he was doing all right personally. Even though Lawrence wasn't playing anymore, he was still my friend, and he was still on the team—he was suspended from the team, not thrown off of it. I still saw him at Clinton's or Damon's house. It was hard for him. Lawrence knew he made a mistake. And he accepted responsibility for what he did, but he wanted to move on. Lawrence told me one day, 'I know what I did was wrong. Understand where I'm coming from. I will do everything I can, and everything they tell me I have to do, to get back on that field.' At the same time, we were constantly thinking about '1:16' every single day."

With Phillips out Osborne leaned on true freshman Ahman Green in the running attack. Childs and Benning were the first two options, but both ended up getting hurt, allowing Green a shot that he would make the most of from his first snap as a starter.

"Ahman Green really stepped forward for us," Frazier said. "I saw a lot of myself in Ahman. He was a guy who just wanted to go out and play football, win and have fun. A lot of people don't realize that Ahman came in at just the right time. He had an offensive line that was full of veterans. If Ahman made a mistake, there were a lot of guys there who could make up for it. Make no mistake, Ahman is a great back and has great speed, and I don't want to take away from that. Early on, Ahman was a speed runner. After a while he ran hard inside. The thing about the whole situation was that the team grew closer together. We had Clinton, Damon and Ahman coming on strong. What happened with Lawrence, I knew, would not cause us to lose any games."

The gap between the Huskers and their opponents, Frazier believes, actually works against the 1995 team in comparing it to the great teams of all time. No team on the Huskers' schedule, and even in the Fiesta Bowl, was able to stay close to the Big Red.

"We were never really challenged. It's like the 1997 team—no one will ever know if Nebraska was better than Michigan. How can anyone say either team is better? The only way to settle it is to play. I think Nebraska would have won—but I can't say I know that for sure."

Frazier claims Phillips—should he ever put all of his problems behind him and mature as a man and an adult—could be an NFL star.

"I played with a lot of great players at Nebraska, from my freshman year until I graduated," Frazier said. "Lawrence is the best back I ever played with, or saw play. He could catch the ball and run both inside and outside."

But Phillips would not bring down the good ship Nebraska that year. The team, regardless of its feelings over the Phillips incident—or any other scenario being played out in the press—was going to solidify Osborne's legacy with back-to-back championships. That meant taking one game at a time and winning all of them in a fashion rarely seen in the modern era of college football.

"For the rest of the season, we took the attitude that whatever

happens off the field stays off the field," Frazier said. "Once you put on the pads, it was all football."

REPEATING FOR COACH OSBORNE

As the 1995 season wore on, the players saw how the national media was labeling Osborne. The players were annoyed at first and then started to strike back, announcing their unconditional support and love for Osborne, not unlike he had always done for his players. And they believed that Osborne handled the Phillips incident in the way that was best for everyone involved.

"During this whole time, seeing the labels being stuck on Coach Osborne really bothered me," Frazier said. "He was never a win-at-all-costs coach. I was so proud to have a coach like him who accepts you for who you are, realizes you are human and wants to help you deal with, and learn from, your mistakes. Coach Osborne, when you sign to play football with him, makes you a part of his family. He will always be there for you, and when you need it, he will make sure you get the help you need."

Frazier had time to reflect on how his family life was different from Phillips' as the controversy swirled in Lincoln.

"The whole Lawrence thing made me appreciate my parents more than ever," Frazier said. "I know a lot of guys who are like Lawrence, who don't have a lot of parental support. It is very hard for those kids. Football put structure into Lawrence's life. We have somewhere to go in the afternoons. And from working our bodies so hard physically and mentally, we would be tired when we got home and wanted to go to sleep, not go out and get in trouble."

After the blood-clot problem in 1994, Frazier did not need to ever be told to keep his focus on football in 1995, despite the constant distractions coming from off-the-field matters.

"What I had been through the previous year, with the blood

clots, really helped me keep my perspective,” Frazier said. “Maybe that’s why things happened the way they did my junior year—maybe God was putting out a warning that things were moving too fast for me.”

Before the win over Arizona State—following the Phillips incident and the Damon Benning incident (which Benning was completely cleared of later)—the team talked to see where they could make the rest of the season go smoother. Unlike the Titanic, the Huskers were still very much on course and in good shape, despite the constant off-the-field emotional icebergs. The key was to steer clear of the icebergs before they got close enough for problems to arise. The meeting was preventive medicine in every sense. That meeting, led by the team captains Tony Veland, Aaron Graham, Christian Peter and Phil Ellis, potentially saved the season.

“The team meeting before the Arizona State game really turned things around,” Frazier said. “It was an open-forum meeting. If you had anything negative or positive to say, this was the time. The coaches did not even know about the meeting until the next day. I think Christian Peter started it off. He said, ‘There are a lot of things going on around here that we need to clean up.’ ”

The rules of the meeting were simple: There were none.

“You could say anything, from what you didn’t like about someone, to what people were doing to even how they were playing—nothing was off-limits,” Frazier said. “You had stuff coming out in that meeting that you could not believe people were saying. The captains said up front not to take anything personal. But we had to have that meeting to clear the air and re-analyze our focus. A lot of the problems that were reported weren’t accurate. Still, things were happening, and people were putting themselves in a position where it looked bad. So the purpose of the whole meeting was to make everyone aware of that, and to avoid those kinds of situations. After that meeting, the team grew closer together.”

While some media reports had the team clearing the air about the Phillips incident, Frazier said that wasn’t the case.

“Ironically, the Lawrence Phillips thing was not brought up at

all," Frazier said. "It was more a meeting about controlling yourself and things to avoid. Some guys had not been going to all their classes, and the captains made a point to address that. No one condoned what Lawrence did. Everyone spoke in that meeting. If you didn't, it meant either you did not care, or you thought you were perfect, and we all knew none of us was perfect."

The meeting became emotional at times.

"It got really ugly in there, and some guys were yelling—it was obvious that people felt very strongly about things," Frazier said. "Everyone in the media asked us what that meeting was about—but we swore to keep it confidential."

The air-clearing was just what the team needed. Now with everything out in the open—albeit behind closed doors—the Huskers were ready to put an exclamation point on a season filled with question marks.

"From there the team was on the right track," Frazier said.

The Huskers talked about watching out for on-the-field roadblocks as well. They knew teams would give the Huskers their best shot every game—what better way for a team to claim its season a success than to hand the undefeated defending national champions their first regular-season loss in three years?

"It was in the back of our minds that every great team has a lapse, a game that is shaky or rocky—basically, tougher than it needed to be," Frazier said. "That was never the case for us. We were prepared for that, and Coach Osborne made sure we were prepared for it. He brought up the Iowa State game from 1992—the game that will never die. But that was important because it can happen even to the best team."

But it never happened to the 1995 team.

FRAZIER ERA BEGINS TO WIND DOWN

This story, written by Bob Schaller, appeared in the Scottsbluff *Star-Herald* after Nebraska beat Washington State, 35-21, to run the Huskers' record to 5-0 during the 1995 season:

So many postscripts, so little time. Lock the door and put the kids to bed because we need to address a pending departure. Look at the calendar: You see 1995. Remember 1991? That was when the state of Nebraska held its collective breath as Tommie Frazier, a hot high school recruit out of Bradenton, Florida, decided—after much deliberation—that he would become a Husker.

It was billed as a second coming of sorts, a young gridiron saint who would take Tom Osborne and the entire NU program on his young shoulders and carry them to college football's promised land.

Four years, only three losses—keep in mind this author is no math doctorate, but I'm pretty sure that's fewer than a loss a year to this point. Frazier, a senior, was again the complete professional Saturday, throwing for 99 yards, rushing for 87 more on 15 carries while completing a touchdown pass and running for another two TDs.

Tommie Frazier: He personifies Nebraska football much like John Elway defines the Broncos.

"Tommie is such a leader," said Husker center Aaron Graham. "In the huddle, he's just in such control."

Tommie Frazier: He delivered one national championship last year after surviving surgery to remove a blood clot in the middle of the season.

Tommie Frazier: From outpatient surgery to Orange Bowl Most Valuable Player. Saturday, he was again Tommie Terrific. And he felt

like he had a little something to prove after hearing Washington State players talking about a possible upset.

"They're supposed to come in here to Memorial Stadium and win?" Frazier asked sarcastically. "I was just shaking my head. All of a sudden, the game starts, and we're popping big plays."

Big-play Frazier was even more appalled that the Cougars kept talking a good game when they were down by a couple of touchdowns, culminating with a cheek-to-cheek confrontation with Washington State middle linebacker James Darling after Frazier scored in the second quarter.

"He said, 'That won't happen again,' " Frazier said. "I said, 'It only takes one time.' When you come to our place, you don't intimidate us."

One time. One millisecond of an opening in the line, and Frazier is through it before the scoreboard operator can punch up six more points. The touchdowns have been nice. What was also nice was the block Frazier used to level a linebacker—in front of the Cougar bench, nonetheless—on a Husker sweep, springing Clester Johnson for a first down.

"I felt good delivering it," Frazier said, adding with a smile, "I've been working on it."

Always working. Almost always winning. The crowd is often called the "10th man," but it is Frazier himself who tilts the field when he begins to work his magic.

There have been many distractions this season. Yet like the old Timex you find in the closet still keeping the right time, Frazier just keeps...well, he just keeps on being Tommie Frazier.

"This game is played on the field," Frazier said. "Not in the locker room, not in the media."

The off-the-field debates are out of his control. So Frazier keeps going, going and going. Giving us more memories, extending the tradition of the Big Red, doing the little things that lead those around him to dub him "special."

"That's the best word to describe him—special," said fullback Brian Schuster. "I don't know if you can replace a Tommie Frazier."

PULLING TOGETHER DESPITE DISTRACTIONS

While Frazier will leave it to college football fans and pundits to decide whether the 1995 Huskers were the best college football team ever, he does know one thing about his team was unquestionably special: Its focus.

"I do not know of a team," Frazier said, "that pulled together more than the 1995 team."

That said, Frazier hung around with hardly anyone on the team. He did occasionally spend time with Childs, Benning and former Manatee teammate Tyrone Williams, who was now a starting defensive back for the Huskers, but he didn't go out to eat with teammates after practice, and he didn't catch movies with them on Sundays.

"I was not close to a lot of players on that team," Frazier said. "I was closer to some than others."

Frazier does not like it when people ask about the other players on the team who had well-documented run-ins with the law.

"People ask me about Christian Peter, but how can I comment on what he went through?" Frazier asked. "I don't know what happened, and I haven't heard his side of it. So I can't say he was right or wrong."

However, Frazier was living with Tyrone Williams when Williams was accused of firing a gun at a car. No one was hurt, but Williams ended up serving a brief jail sentence for the incident.

"I do know about Tyrone Williams' incident," Frazier said. "I was Tyrone's roommate at the time all that happened. It bothered me the way Tyrone was portrayed, but it also bothered me that everyone who was around Tyrone that night shied away from him when everything came out in public."

The night of the incident, Williams was quiet when he arrived home. Williams, Frazier said, is basically shy anyway, although he was extra quiet that night.

"It was ironic because I kind of suspected something had happened that night," Frazier said. "I did not know for sure until Coach Osborne called the next morning and said he wanted to see us in his office. Coach does not call at five in the morning for no reason. On the way to Coach's office, Tyrone said, 'Tommie, something happened last night.' I asked Tyrone what happened, and he explained to me what happened. We left it at that. Everyone knew I would support him. He had a lot of people around him who supported him. Tyrone did not think he would have to go to jail for that. But some other players had been in trouble, and they wanted to make an example of Tyrone. It was one of those things where I was there for him, and I supported him. Tyrone and I were like brothers. We grew up together and played together. It's just one of those things where everything happens for a reason. It made Tyrone a stronger person. I know he would have supported me if I ever went through anything like that."

"People think Nebraska football players get away with a lot, but they don't," Frazier said. "They get away with a lot less. The police are harder on the football players than they are on anyone else. If something happens, the first thing the police will do is call the coach. And if it's a player who does something, you know the first one the police are going to call about it is (Lancaster County Attorney) Gary Lacey."

Williams appreciated Frazier's support.

"As the years passed, we grew closer," Williams said. "He's the kind of friend who is always there, in good times and the bad. Whatever comes up, he's not going to forget his friends. We came to Lincoln together, and neither one of us knew anyone else out here. So we grew closer."

The season went on, of course, despite the constant attention for the off-the-field matters.

One quasi-off-the-field matter that should be settled on the

field—but is not—is the Heisman Trophy. Frazier was a contender for it but did not carry the voting in the crucial big-media-market in the East.

“Before the Fiesta Bowl, there was a lot of talk and controversy about the Heisman Trophy,” Frazier said. “But it never bothered me because the whole Heisman Trophy thing is politics. Really, it is nothing short of a political scandal. It did not bother me—honestly.”

Asked about it after every game during the season, Frazier tried to be polite in his answers, knowing all along he had no shot whatsoever at winning the award.

“I had my mind already made up early in the year that I would not win it,” Frazier said. “It is all political. People ask me if I was upset. I said no. The main thing to remember is that football is a team sport. You are remembered for what your team accomplished, not for the individual honors, even though those are great.”

And that’s exactly where Frazier would make his mark, as a key member of the winningest team over a three-year span in college football history.

“I would rather be remembered for the team’s accomplishments than my honors,” Frazier said. “In my mind, even the week before the Fiesta Bowl when everyone was asking me about the Heisman, I really did not have any thoughts about the Heisman. The voting didn’t surprise me. I’m fine with it. Really, I have had no second thoughts about it. Everyone else—the ones who did not vote for me—knew who the best player in the country was. And don’t get me wrong, I like (Ohio State running back) Eddie George, who won it. We talked in New York, and I got to know him, and like him. But even he knew who the best player was.”

The rap against Frazier during the Heisman talk was that he was a running quarterback. Frazier got tired of telling folks that he was known as a running quarterback because that’s what the Husker offense required.

“Nebraska is not known for passing,” Frazier said. “If I was at Florida State, people would have said, ‘Wow, this guy can throw!’ When we did pass, we had success with it. Our main thing was to

run the ball. People say that I could not have played at Florida State, but I could have. Yet how many quarterbacks who went to Florida, Florida State or Miami could run the offense at Nebraska?"

After being bypassed for the Heisman, scores of other honors did come Frazier's way.

"To win the Johnny Unitas Golden Arm Award (as the country's top quarterback) my senior year meant a lot," Frazier said. "It showed people that option quarterbacks can win awards like that also. There's always going to be that stereotype that option quarterbacks can't win those kinds of awards. My winning it—and again, my teammates and coaches should get a lot of credit for it—showed that no matter what kind of system that you are in, if you go out and play and excel, you will get what you deserve."

NO HEISMAN FOR FRAZIER?

This story, written by Bob Schaller, appeared in the Scottsbluff *Star-Herald* after Nebraska beat Colorado, 44-21, to run the Huskers' record to 8-0 during the 1995 season:

Is the question, really, WHETHER Nebraska quarterback Tommie Frazier should win the Heisman Trophy?

Or is it how could Frazier NOT win the Heisman after keeping the defending national champions both focused and undefeated after Saturday's 44-21 trouncing of Colorado?

"It would be hard to see how Tommie wouldn't get the Heisman," said Nebraska split end Brenden Holbein after Frazier completed 14-of-23 passes for 241 yards and two touchdowns. Even coach Tom Osborne had plenty to say about Frazier's performance in such a big game.

"He's a great player who really holds things together," Osborne said. "He's very tough. He took some shots and showed a lot of poise. He's the difference maker."

After losing I-backs to injuries and off-the-field problems, Frazier kept the Huskers on track, despite losing four of the five starting linemen from last year's team.

"I know nothing can be taken away from what (I-backs) Ahman Green, Clinton Childs and Damon Benning have done," Holbein said. "But you just can't replace what Tommie can do."

Frazier also rushed 13 times for 40 yards. Again, it was the "Frazier factor" itself that carried NU. An example was during a touchdown drive late in the first half. Frazier was getting sacked, but before his knee hit the ground, Frazier lofted a perfect pass to Green, who gained 35 yards and set up the Huskers inside the CU 10-yard line.

"I just had to stay up," Frazier said, "because I knew where Ahman was."

Green was as surprised as anyone that Frazier even got the pass off.

"Usually, the I-backs are a last resort on passing plays," Green said. "I really didn't see who had his hands on Tommie—I just saw the ball coming to me."

Green, a true freshman, said Frazier brings more to the field than fans can understand.

"There's a lot of leadership there," Green said. "He's always in the game, and he keeps us in the game."

Center Aaron Graham has been a teammate of Frazier's as long as any Husker.

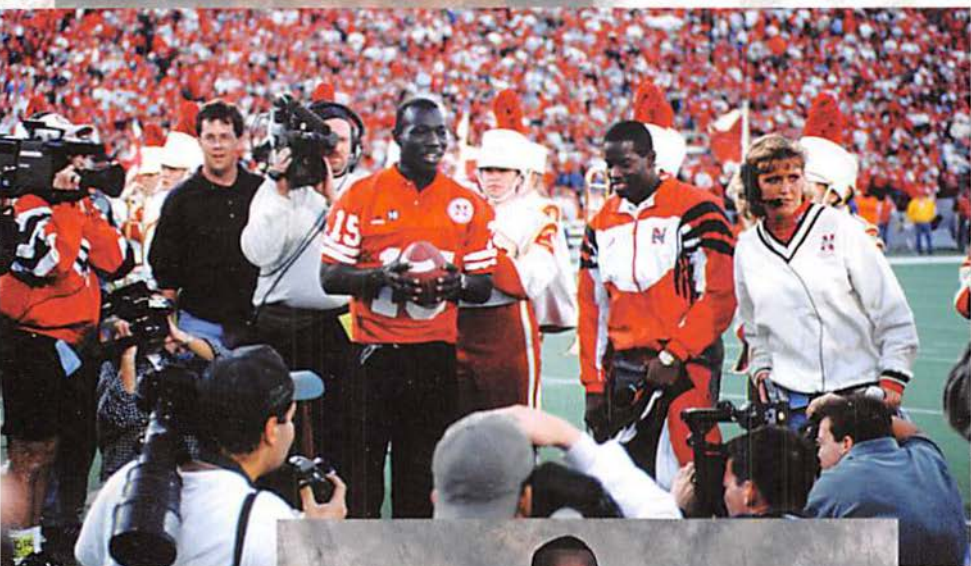
"The thing I love about Tommie is his competitiveness," Graham said. "The way Tommie's playing right now, he has to be the favorite to win the Heisman."

Frazier, as usual, refused to hype himself for the Heisman. Maybe that's why he **MUST** win it—because the greatest player in the land would surely never admit to being the chosen one.

"All I thought about today," Frazier said, "was that we'd never lost to Colorado. And I didn't want to start losing to those guys now."



Coach Osborne and Tommie with his retired jersey in front of the back-to-back national championship trophies.



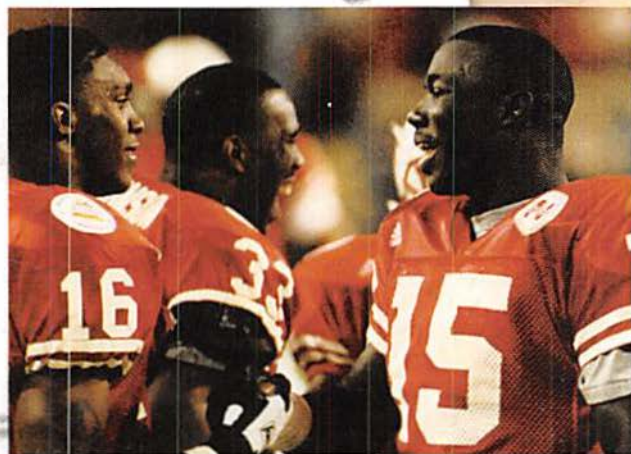
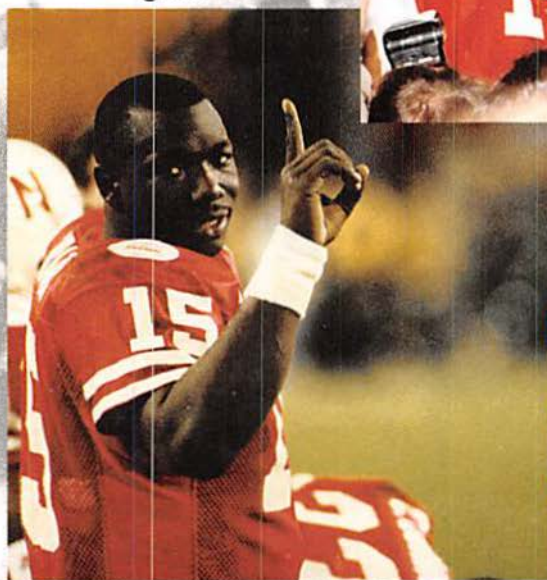
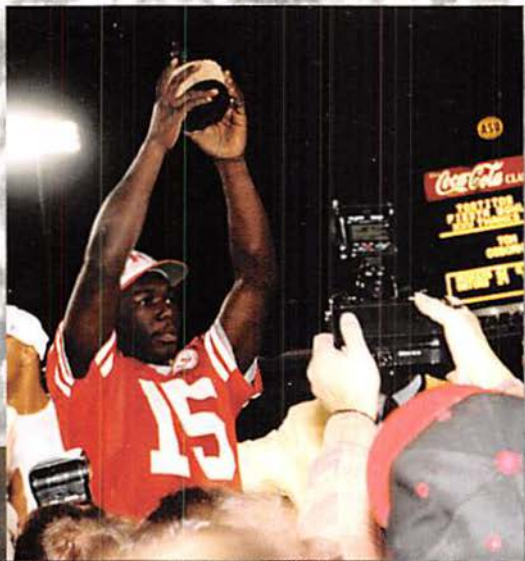
Quarterback coach Turner Gill introduces Tommie before his No. 15 jersey is retired.

Tommie surrounded by the Husker's national championship trophies while holding his 1995 Johnny Unitas Golden Arm Award.



Frazier accepts the MVP award at the Fiesta Bowl. It was his third straight year to win the Husker's Bowl MVP.

Few would argue with Frazier after the Huskers convincing win against Florida in the national championship game in 1996.



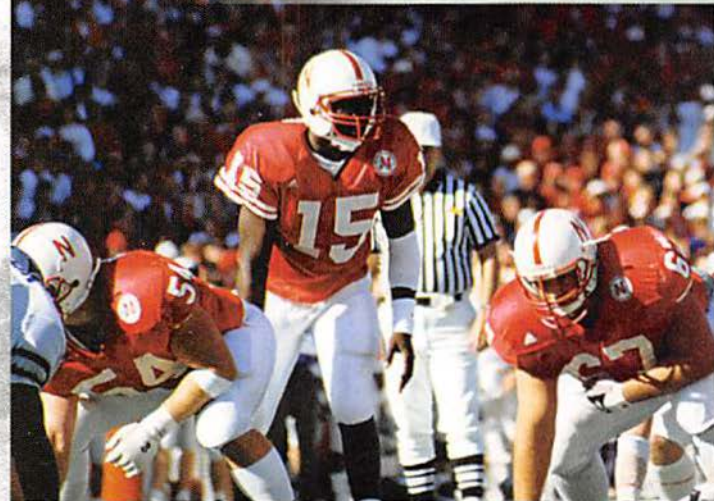
Tommy's final press conference as a Husker after the 1997 Fiesta Bowl.(above)

Earlier he congratulated Eric Stokes (16) after the game.

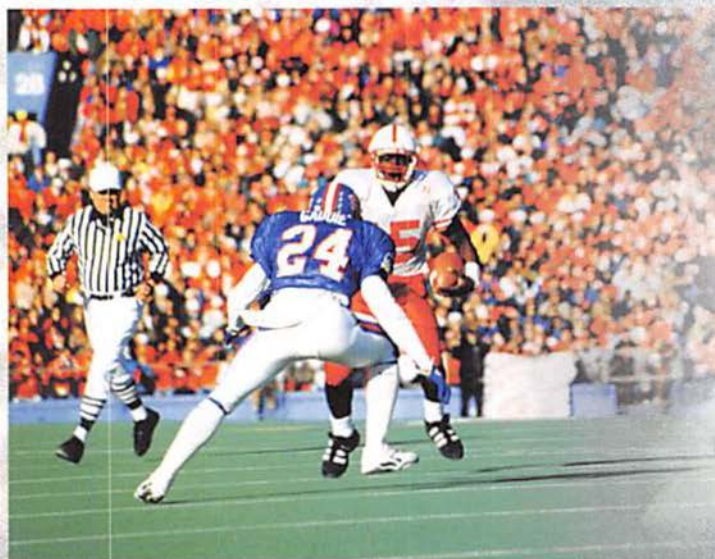


Tommie warms up during practice a few days before his first Orange Bowl in Miami.

Frazier executes a handoff to true freshman Ahman Green during the '95 season.



Tommie changes the play at the line of scrimmage before taking the snap from Aaron Graham.

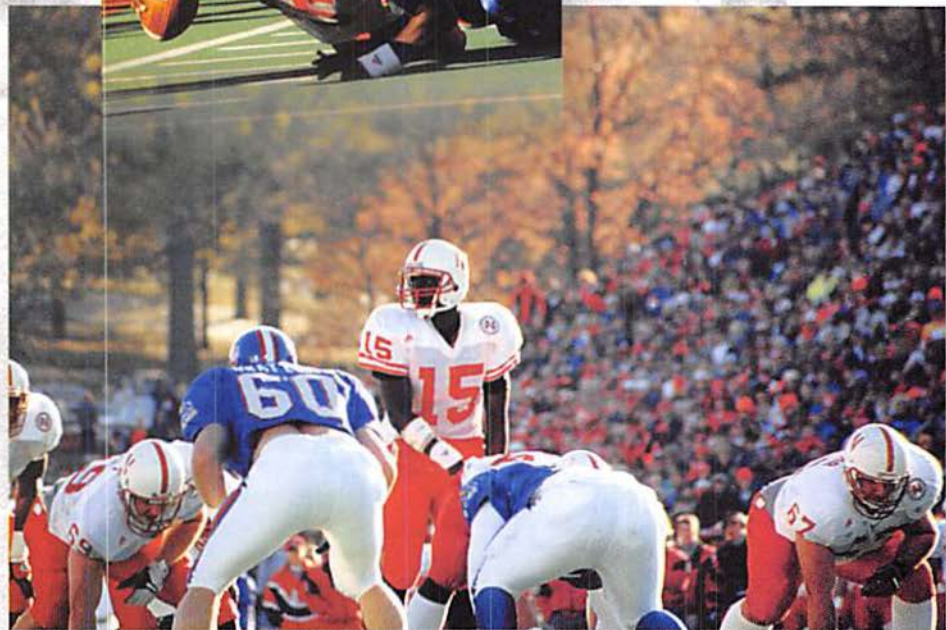


Frazier prepares to leave another defender behind as he breaks into the open field.



Tommie stretches for every possible yard against Kansas during the 1995 season.

Few college stadiums provide the scenic backdrop as the Kansas Jayhawks field in Lawrence.





Tommie, his parents, and brother Rod with the Heisman Trophy he nearly won following his senior season.



Tommie's mother and sister cheer him on during the Fiesta Bowl.

Tyrone Williams, Tommie and Big John Earnest air boating on the Platte River near Cedar Creek, NE.

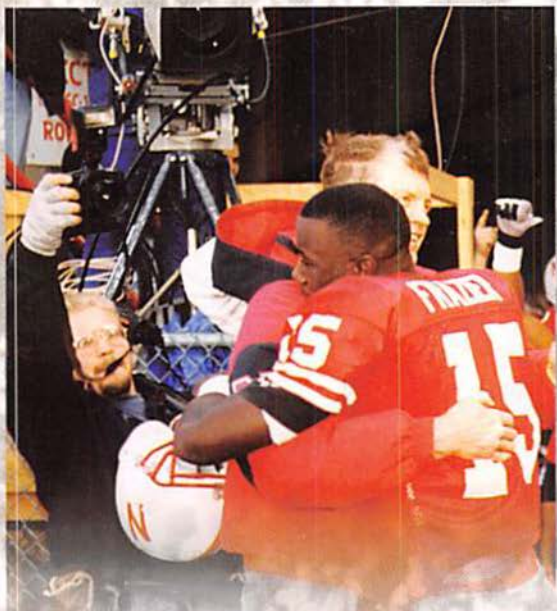




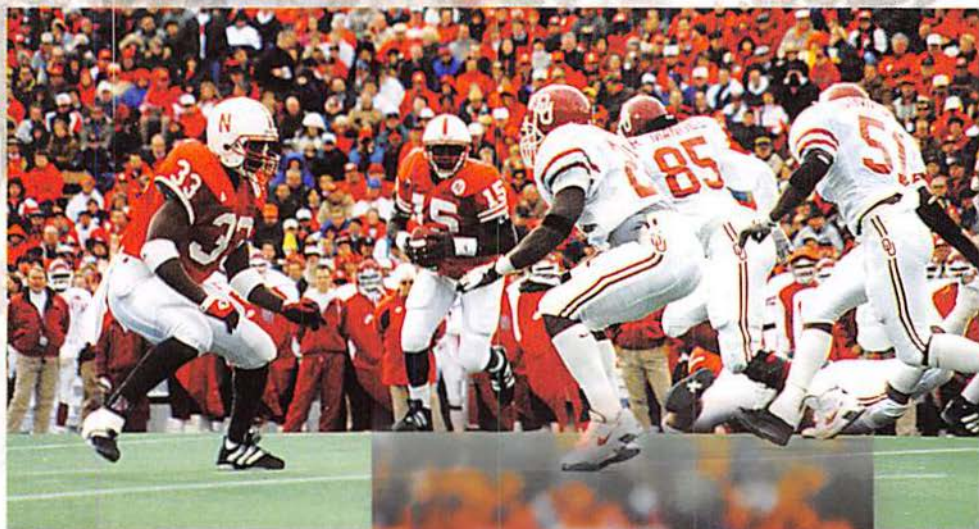
Tommie as a high school senior at Disney World's Grad Nite '92.



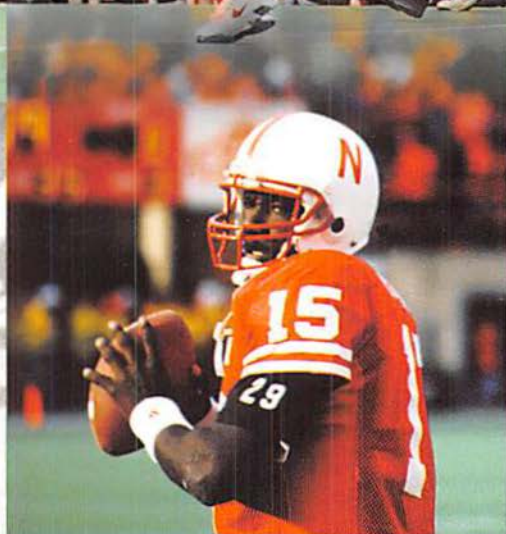
Tommie Frazier spins away from several Gator defenders to score on a 75-yard run.



Coach Osborne and Tommie Frazier embrace before taking the field for his final home game in Memorial Stadium.



Clester Johnson prepares to seal off a Sooner defender during a Husker romp in Lincoln in 1995.



Tommie sets his sights on a contact downfield.



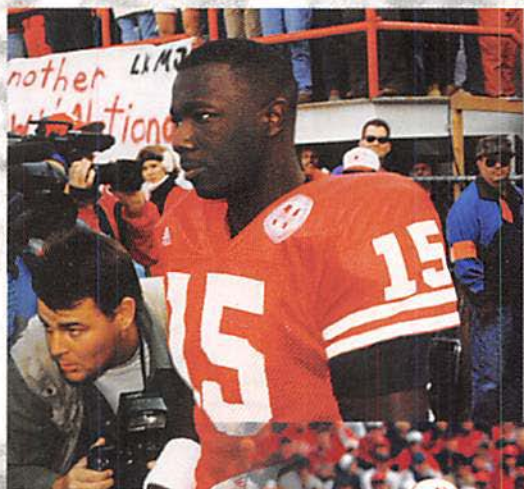
Frazier breaks free from an Arizona State defender. (left)



Frazier runs the option against Missouri. (below)

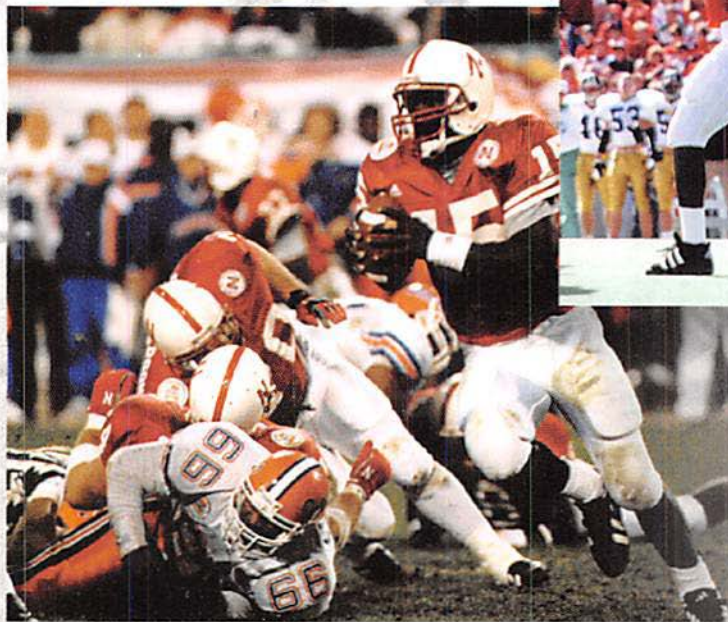


Brian Schuster (28) leads Frazier upfield against Oklahoma in Lincoln during the 1995 season.



Frazier's no-nonsense leadership style helped lead the Huskers to back-to-back national championships.

Steve Ott (69) and Aaron Taylor (67) clear a path at the line of scrimmage for Frazier.



The offensive line clears the way for several of Frazier's game-high 199 rushing yards in the '96 Fiesta Bowl.

FRAZIER'S ARM INEXPLICABLY UNDERRATED

This story, written by Bob Schaller, appeared in the Scottsbluff *Star-Herald* after Nebraska beat Colorado, 44-21, to run the Huskers' record to 8-0 during the 1995 season:

Time to go ahead and pass on the passing questions.

As Tommie Frazier was rushing his way into the Nebraska record books, critics were singing songs about the Huskers' passing game: No downfield passing, no consistency, no timing—really, it was starting to take on a broken-record sort of life of its own.

Well, that idle chatter has gone the way of the 33 vinyl LP.

Because Frazier and the Husker receivers were on the same page and note all game long, as No. 2 Nebraska beat No. 7 Colorado, 44-21, in Boulder Saturday.

"If we weren't more worried about yards than points in the second half," NU coach Tom Osborne said, "we would've passed instead of run in the second half."

Frazier was 9-of-13 in the first half with no interceptions.

"He was pretty much on the money with everything he threw today," Osborne said. "He wasn't much off the mark with anything."

Frazier finished the game with 241 yards passing after completing 14-of-23 passes.

"I think the passing game is where we need it to be," Frazier said. "The coaches might say otherwise—I don't know."

Five different receivers caught passes from Frazier in the first half. And the proverbial straw that broke the Buffs' back wasn't delivered by the usual Husker method of ground attack. Indeed, that straw was air-mailed by Frazier as the half wore down. Frazier directed the Huskers 83 yards on only nine plays. He completed four of six passes on the drive for 35 yards. However, one of the

TOUCHDOWN TOMMIE

drops was a shovel pass that Ahman Green dropped behind the line of scrimmage. The other incomplection was an overthrow to Reggie Baul. Still, Frazier helped the Huskers to a first down on that play as CU's Daryl Price was fined 15 yards for a late hit on Frazier.

Frazier, who completed a 52-yard touchdown pass to Clester Johnson in the first quarter, then hit Jon Vedral with a seven-yard scoring strike with 10 seconds left in the half as the Huskers pushed their lead to 31-14.

"The passing game," said Vedral, "is really going well."

FRAZIER MORTALLY WOUNDS JAYHAWKS

This story, written by Bob Schaller, appeared in the Scottsbluff *Star-Herald* after Nebraska beat Kansas, 41-3, to run the Huskers' record to 10-0 during the 1995 season:

He was hurting, but he knew he had work to do.

Tommie Frazier came out of the Nebraska locker room, crutches bearing the bulk of his body weight.

The Huskers had just demolished No. 10 Kansas, 41-3, Saturday afternoon, during which Frazier passed Jerry Tagge as Nebraska's all-time total offense leader. Frazier ran for 99 yards and threw for 86. Those 185 yards gave Frazier 5,313, surpassing Tagge's 5,283.

The media crush after the game was far more bruising than Kansas' defense was during the game, especially since Frazier had no blockers as the microphones and cameras were shoved toward his face. Frazier shifted himself to keep weight off of his painful right foot and ankle.

"The whole foot hurts," Frazier said as steam emanated from his mouth in the cold Kansas night air. "It got worse as the game went on."

It is supposed to be the other way around; that is, things are supposed to get worse for other teams as the game goes on, as anyone unfortunate enough to set up shop across the line of scrimmage from Frazier knows.

But he hurt. So badly, in fact that he chose to stop rather than put weight on the sore leg as he waited for a path to clear while trying to board the team bus.

"Tommie played very well," Nebraska coach Tom Osborne said a few feet away, "other than the interception."

Now THAT hurts.

No, Tommie Terrific wasn't Flawless Frazier as the mercury in the thermometer did a Frazier-like dipsy-do. He did throw an interception. But the fact that he even threw himself to the Jayhawks Saturday probably said as much about Frazier as anything.

Don't forget, this is a player who came back from blood clots in his leg to claim Most Valuable Player honors in the Orange Bowl just a short time later, securing the national championship for Nebraska by directing two second-half touchdown drives.

And this is a player who has lost only one regular-season game in his career at Nebraska. This is a young man who has accounted for 78 touchdowns in fewer than four years at Nebraska—42 passing, 36 rushing.

This is Tommie Frazier, the one who, like Tagge, will be talked about by your children in a couple of decades. Especially if Frazier guides HIS Huskers—and make no mistake, this is Tommie Frazier's team—to a second consecutive national championship.

Yet Osborne couldn't be sure during the past week whether Frazier would play, making Saturday's career total offense feat—no pun intended—that much more impressive.

"He was having some trouble with his feet," Osborne said, before adding the understatement, "but he seemed to function."

Will Frazier be able to play against Oklahoma in two weeks? Even though MRI scans were negative for blood clots, is this related to last year's injury?

"Two more games left," Frazier said. "I'll be there."

Tommie Frazier was still hurting, but he knew he had work to do.

GATOR: IT'S WHAT'S FOR DINNER

Despite the incredible domination the Huskers showed throughout the 1995 season, they still found themselves the underdog against undefeated Florida as the two teams prepared to battle for the national championship in Tempe, Arizona, in the Fiesta Bowl.

That did not bother the Huskers. While they were supposed to lose by only a few points, they knew they would win—and they would not win by just a few points, either.

"There was a pretty strong feeling on our team that we would do more than just beat Florida, that we would crush them," Frazier said. "We had talked about it, and it looked more and more like we would really crush them. The thing that sticks out in my mind is watching ESPN the night after the Fiesta Bowl's media day, and they were showing a story that had Florida's guys dancing with ESPN college football analyst Lee Corso. I was like, 'These guys are not ready. They are going to get it.' "

Frazier said Florida was a good team, but they did not have enough big-game experience to even give the well-prepared Huskers a contest.

"There is so much more on the line in a bowl game," Frazier said. "During the regular season, you play to get the game under control and, as they say, you 'call off the dogs.' In a bowl game, you play to knock the other team out, as though you were a fighter."

Listening to some R&B music to relax during the day leading up to the evening game, Frazier found a very comfortable peace as he thought about what he needed to do.

"My mindset going into that game was very calm—probably the most relaxed I had ever been," Frazier said. "We knew without a

doubt that we would win that game—everyone on our team knew it. You could see it when we got off the bus at the stadium that day—you could see it when we were warming up—you could see it everywhere. That senior class was ready to go out a winner. Is there any way you could imagine that group of seniors going out with a loss?"

The fact that the Huskers were underdogs was only more motivation. However, Frazier believes it is absurd to consider one team an underdog when No. 1 is playing No. 2 and the teams are ranked that close in the polls.

"I just wanted to go out, have fun, and make the most of our last game," Frazier said. "I did not care that we were underdogs. I never let any of those things bother me. It is funny to think about: How can you have an underdog when No. 1 plays No. 2? I can see if you have No. 1 playing No. 10; then you have an underdog. But No. 1 playing No. 2? There's no way you could have an underdog in that kind of matchup."

Since Florida overlooked Frazier during the recruiting process, Frazier took a little extra satisfaction in beating his home-state university. Of course, had it worked out right, Frazier would have won the national championship over all three major Florida universities—Florida State (in 1993, an 18-16 loss), Miami (in 1994, a 24-17 win) and, of course, Florida in 1996.

"Playing Florida for the national championship in my last game was special," Frazier said. "They are one of the big universities in my home state, and they showed no interest in me. Then again, I did not show much interest in them. Still, it was a fitting way to end my career. I never really wanted to go to the University of Florida—or Miami and Florida State, either. I had never lived outside of Florida, and I could always go back. If I hadn't signed with Nebraska, I might never have been able to experience the West and the Heartland."

It became apparent quickly after the opening kickoff that the Gators were going to struggle both offensively, trying to move the ball against the Huskers, and defensively, trying to stop Frazier and the rest of the Big Red's offense.

"After the game started, I realized they were in trouble, even after they opened the scoring with a field goal," Frazier said, "because we went right down and answered with a touchdown."

While Frazier still regularly answers questions about his spectacular 75-yard touchdown run in the third quarter, he claims it was not even his most memorable play of the game, personally.

"Everyone remembers the 75-yard touchdown run," Frazier said. "It was not that big of a deal to me. I was just running and trying not to fumble the ball. People always ask me how that play makes me feel. A lot of the people who just happen to see me out somewhere seem to mention that run. Now let me make it clear: I appreciate the adulation and the attention. A lot of parents told me that they show that play to their children to teach them that you never quit on a play—you just keep trying your hardest. I appreciate that, and not giving up is part of my motto. To me, honestly it was just another play. I thought the referee had blown the whistle, but we're taught to keep going until we know for a fact that the play is over. Even after the game, I did not think that play would be that big of a deal. More and more, as time went on, people really talk about that play. It became a much bigger deal than I thought it to be."

Florida coach Steve Spurrier said Frazier and the Huskers "made it look like we weren't trying" to even tackle the Nebraska runners.

Tyrone Williams, a Nebraska cornerback, said after playing football with Frazier from second grade through college, he knows how tough Frazier is to bring down.

"Tommie's not a small guy; he's 6-2, over 210 pounds," Williams said. "And he's moving at about 4.5 speed (40-yard dash time). On top of that, he's elusive. When you did hit him, you didn't think he was as big as he was. That's what happened to the Florida guys during the Fiesta Bowl. Tommie has a very strong lower body. You really have to hit him, whereas most quarterbacks go down when they first get hit."

What Frazier does remember after that game is that he was moved spiritually to thank God for the chance to compete. He remembered all the days in the hospital the previous year, and how

Osborne's prayers and spiritual strength helped Frazier through the long nights and even longer days. CBS Sports' Michelle Tafoya congratulated Frazier for being the Most Valuable Player, "I can't imagine a better way to end your career at Nebraska."

Frazier held up the award and said, "There's no better way to end it. I want to thank all the fans for all their support. I want to thank my teammates. And most of all, most important, I want to thank the Lord Jesus Christ above, because without Him, I wouldn't have been able to accomplish anything that I have."

Looking back, Frazier said the words were both unrehearsed and thus, unplanned.

"It is something where I know I am playing out there for the Lord Jesus Christ," Frazier said. "I grew up going to church. I just did not go on the consistent basis that I should have. I started going a few years back here. A lot of people have come up to me and said those words were the best part of the whole game, even including the national championship. It's just something I felt—something that is a part of me. It is inside me."

Frazier's high school coach, Joe Kinnan, said he got a special feeling watching Frazier in the Fiesta Bowl for another reason.

"Reggie Green, from Bradenton Southeast High School, was on ESPN with Tommie for their Scholastic America show back when Tommie was in high school," Kinnan said. "Reggie went to Florida. It was fun to watch them face off for the national championship."

"After the game, Danny Wuerffel showed a lot of class," Frazier said. "He congratulated me and said, 'The better team won.' "

FRAZIER'S LAST PERFORMANCE

This story, written by Bob Schaller, appeared in the Scottsbluff *Star-Herald* after Nebraska beat Florida, 62-24, in the Fiesta Bowl to claim Coach Osborne's second consecutive national championship:

It would have been the play of the game, had he not later turned in the play of the year.

With 2:28 left in the third quarter of Tuesday night's Fiesta Bowl and Nebraska facing second down and 10 from the Florida 35-yard line, Tommie Frazier took one step backward with the snap.

But not just one step backward. No, Frazier followed that first step with 35 yards worth of forward steps, going untouched up the middle through the heart of the suddenly pulse-less Florida defense for a touchdown. That gave the Husker quarterback 120 yards on 13 carries—with 2:21 left in the third quarter. And it put the Huskers ahead, 42-10, on the way to a 62-24 win over No. 2 Florida in the Fiesta Bowl.

"It's something where you look at a defense for a month," Frazier said, "and you find a weakness."

What would he do for an encore?

On Nebraska's following possession, Frazier went 75 yards, shaking off eight Florida defenders, including Florida defensive backs Fred Weary and Lawrence Wright.

Frazier, who allowed himself a slight smile as he crossed the goal line, put the Huskers up 49-19. In the process, he set another record with that run—195 yards on 14 carries, a Fiesta Bowl rushing record. And keep in mind that was only through three quarters.

"They were tackling the ball," Frazier said. "They were trying to take the ball."

During Frazier's four years—and two national titles—we saw him sweat, the perspiration dripping with his face mask. We saw him come back when doctors and critics said a blood-clotting condition would keep him from playing again last season.

We saw him handle with the utmost class the Heisman Trophy hype, keeping a cool head when the most ridiculous remarks and questions were thrown at him like a third-and-long screen pass with no downfield blocking.

But most of all, we saw Tommie Frazier win.

In 1993, 1994 and 1995, Frazier led the Huskers to undefeated regular seasons, although backup quarterback Brook Berringer had a big hand in last season's success while Frazier was out.

Last year, Frazier came in on a white stallion to rescue Nebraska and its national championship hopes in the Orange Bowl, helping NU overcome two second-half turnovers and directing two scoring drives to send Miami home. And in the process, he sent Nebraska to the top of the college football world.

This season, with the team appearing to come apart at the I-back position, we saw Frazier become the glue that held an undefeated national title march together.

"Frazier," Nebraska coach Tom Osborne said, still soaking with water from the Gatorade shower, "is a great football player."

With Lawrence Phillips running all over Florida, Frazier didn't have to be spectacular in the Fiesta Bowl.

But he was anyway.

Frazier ran for 55 yards on his first nine carries of the game. More impressive, he completed four passes—to four different receivers—in the first half before coming back and hitting Clester Johnson for a big gain in the third quarter.

"This was a big game," said Nebraska center Aaron Graham. "What else did you expect from Tommie Frazier?"

With a confidence rarely displayed by a freshman since the likes of Tom Rathman, according to Osborne, Frazier stepped onto the hallowed turf at Memorial Stadium his first year and decided the Huskers would be his team.

When the I-back position was decimated by injuries and Phillips suspended, Frazier directed the Huskers to four consecutive wins without a single turnover and no offensive penalties during a three-game span. That's impressive for any quarterback, but even more so for one who runs the option.

No one left more impressed with Frazier than Florida.

"Not many quarterbacks run the ball like a running back and run people over," said Florida defensive tackle David Barnard. "Frazier does all the little things."

And all the big things, too—basically, whatever needs to be done.

Frazier ends his career as the Huskers all-time total offense leader, an All-American and the 1995 Johnny Unitas Golden Arm Award winner, given annually to the nation's top quarterback. The list of honors goes on and on, just like Frazier did for four years, winning MVP honors in both the 1994 and 1995 Orange Bowls, and then offensive MVP honors against Florida Tuesday night in the Fiesta Bowl.

We saw him run. We saw him throw. We saw him score. But what we saw in the face of a storm of adversity was a confidence, courage and drive that let us know the job would get done.

We saw the last of him Tuesday night. And we might never see the likes of his kind again. Frazier had 199 yards on 16 carries Tuesday night. That's 199 memories, for those of you still counting.

THE MAN WHO CHANGED MY LIFE

What Tommie Frazier saw from Coach Tom Osborne during the entire 1995 season—and both before and after that—changed Tommie's life. Osborne was a committed Christian, firmly supportive of his players while at the same time making sure that they were responsible for their actions. Frazier respected the way Osborne would never abandon any player, from an All-American to a walk-on who never played a down.

"When we started off, it was the kind of relationship where we were just coach and player," Frazier said. "But as the days turned into weeks and the weeks turned into months, the relationship grew into more than that."

Especially when he was in the hospital. Priscilla Frazier would call Tommie daily, and without fail, Osborne would either be in the room, or had just left.

While Frazier was raised in a "traditional" household with two parents, he knows that Osborne is the perfect role model.

"I have a very strong father and mother, but Coach Osborne and I ended up being like a father and son," Frazier said. "I would do anything for Coach Osborne. If he called me today and said, 'I need you to drive six hours each way to Scottsbluff to do something for me,' I'd make the arrangements and do it in a second."

While Tommie was raised in a Christian house—his mother Priscilla has a deep faith in God—he admits he needed some pushing to continue his spiritual development in Lincoln. Listening to Osborne lead prayers for Tommie while he was hospitalized with the blood-clot problem helped Frazier rediscover and move forward in his own faith.

"I was able to strengthen my own faith in God because of Coach Osborne's faith," Frazier said. "Coach did not try to push me at all, but you could always sense his faith. Around holidays you could see him focus more on faith, like around Easter and Christmas. But he never tried to force it on anyone."

The process-driven Osborne let his players know that his love for them was unconditional, and didn't end when the player walked off the field at Memorial Stadium the final time.

"I can go to Coach Osborne for anything—any player can go to him for anything," Frazier said. "He always made a point to say to the seniors to call him if they ever needed anything."

While the players celebrated the national championships—and, indeed, all victories—Frazier said Osborne was always focused on just one thing: Continuous improvement. Even if Nebraska lost, Osborne was content if his team had improved and put forth its best effort. Conversely, Osborne would feel let down after a win if Nebraska did not show improvement in its own play. It was more a situation where Nebraska measured itself against not its opponent, but the Huskers themselves. That philosophy, Frazier believes, mirrors Osborne's view of life, where you do the best you can with the things under your control, have the most positive, sincere effect on those around, and then be grateful as the chips fall where they may knowing you have done all you can, the best that you can.

"After the national championships, he was happy," Frazier said. "Every victory, in a bowl or against Pacific, seemed to mean the same to him. He was more concerned with how we played than the outcome. He knows football is a game where a team plays against itself more than anything else."

As he looks back today, had he known then what he knows now about Coach Osborne, Frazier would have picked a college in a heartbeat—Nebraska.

"Coach Osborne has shown me so many things and taught me so many things that I can't imagine I would have learned from any other coach," Frazier said. "He taught me to be humble. He taught me that in a team sport, it is important not to take too much credit."

The hospital visits from Osborne were more than nice—they provided emotional and spiritual sustenance.

"I remember when I was in the hospital, he kept telling me to be strong and everything would turn out all right," Frazier said. "He'd give me a full report of practice, and even tell me what players got into fights if there was one that day!"

By Frazier's senior year, he was completely on the same page as Osborne during games.

"As a player, I got to the point where I was thinking like him," Frazier said. "Half the time when he sent a play in, I already knew exactly what it was going to be. By knowing the system, the game plan and the down and distance, I knew what he would call. I could have called the game, and it would not have been much different than he did."

On Senior Day, Osborne was true to form, making every player seem special with a simple message.

"When he got to me," Frazier said. "He said, 'Thanks for coming and giving me the opportunity to coach you. Make the last game in front of the crowd a victory.'"

That was no problem. Frazier helped pitch a shutout, 37-0, over—appropriately—Osborne's long-time nemesis, the University of Oklahoma.

The day Osborne retired is something Frazier won't soon forget. While the sports world was shocked by Osborne's announcement, Frazier smiled widely, knowing that Osborne had given the idea plenty of thought and could now spend some much-deserved time with his family.

"I was at the Governor's office that day—actually the day Coach Osborne announced his retirement, I was working my last day for the Governor," Frazier said. "At first I was surprised, and then I wasn't. I knew that it was coming sooner than people thought it would. Some of the things that had gone on—nothing negative—but you could tell he was ready to start the rest of his life. He had spent a lot of time away from his family, and now he is ready to be with them more often."

In Canada as Frazier's brief pro football career came to another untimely, emotionally wrenching end, Osborne was one of the first to contact his former quarterback.

"I even talked to Coach Osborne from the hospital in Montreal," Frazier said. "His words and thoughts have always given me so much support and spiritual strength. I will be grateful to that man the rest of my life."

While players like Tommie Frazier helped Coach Tom Osborne to his first national championship as the Huskers became the premier program in the nation, Frazier said the high level of success rests squarely on the shoulders of the coaching staff.

"Nebraska has a coaching staff that realized it had to make certain adjustments to reach the top of the mountain," Frazier said. "They recruited maybe not the best athletes, but athletes who would make their system work the best."

One of the relationships that grew stronger with time was Frazier's association with receivers coach Ron Brown.

"Coach Brown and I played a game of his where we'd stand at the 35-yard line and try and hit the uprights or the crossbar," Frazier said. "It was a lot of fun. We always saw eye-to-eye on everything, which is the kind of relationship a quarterback should have with a receivers coach. When I saw something going on, I could always go and talk to him about it. When he had something he saw, he came to me about it. He inspired me to go out and be myself. He said if you have faith in God, everything else will take care of itself. Another part of it was that he had tried the NFL, but because of an injury, he never did make it. He was close so many times, but he never was able to make the final roster of an NFL team because of strange things happening."

Quarterback coach Turner Gill was once a Husker quarterback—leading the team to within one play of what would have been Osborne's first national championship during the 1983 season—and could relate well to Frazier.

"Coach Gill was like a brother to me," Frazier said. "He was a brother, a coach and a friend all in one. As a coach, he knew where

I was coming from when I made a certain decision because he had played in the system and understood. As a friend, he was always there. I could always call him. Like Coach Brown, Coach Gill could relate to me really well because he also played in Montreal where I ended up signing. Coach Gill also had his career cut short because of an injury—concussions. He told me about how the CFL field was and what that was like playing on it. Coach Gill was happy I got the opportunity to play up there.”

The coach who recruited Frazier, Kevin Steele—who is now an assistant coach with the Carolina Panthers—remains a close friend of Frazier’s family.

“Kevin Steele—now that guy is my buddy,” Frazier said. “Of course, he was the one who recruited me. He really is a part of our family. We had, and continue to have, a real good relationship. I will always remember the other schools’ coaches trying to get my attention, but Coach Steele was different—he would actually tell me to leave and have fun because he wanted to talk to my folks. Plus, he and my mom liked to play cards together—I still don’t know who won those games, but you are talking about two really competitive people in Kevin and my mother. I have often thought back to the things that Kevin told me, and everything he said was true. He followed through on his word on everything he said. I really respect that.”

One person Frazier had a hard time getting to know well was current Husker head coach Frank Solich. However, in time, that relationship also matured.

“Coach Solich was different,” Frazier said. “He was always serious. He and I had a few falling outs over me doing something the way Coach Gill told me to do it, instead of the way Coach Solich told me to do it. But it was no one’s fault—just a miscommunication between the coaches, and it stayed on the field. We were friends off the field, and still are. I have a lot of respect for him. Toward the end of my career at Nebraska, we got to be better friends.”

Offensive line coaches Dan Young and Milt Tenopir were also among the best at their jobs.

"Coach Young and Coach Tenopir were always real nice to me, although we didn't have a lot of interaction because they coached the line and I was a quarterback," Frazier said. "They never did say anything about the time I grabbed that lineman's facemask on my first play as a freshman."

One of Frazier's favorite personalities belonged to defensive coordinator Charlie McBride.

"Coach McBride and I have always had a kind of competitive relationship, but in a healthy way," Frazier said. "He wanted to stop me, and I wouldn't let him. But we had a lot of laughs. He understood my position, and I understood his job. He's one of the best defensive coordinators in the nation. He had a different personality from the other coaches; he didn't think twice about chewing someone out if they made a mistake, if that's what needed to be done. He will find some way to motivate his players to get the job done. If that means pulling someone to the sidelines for two series, he will do that."

Secondary coach George Darlington, the lone member from Osborne's first coaching staff, is also a special person, according to Frazier.

"Coach Darlington and I had an inside joke; he always called me the 'scout-team quarterback,' " Frazier said. "So I'd call him the 'scout team coach.' We laughed about it—it was done in fun because Coach Darlington has a great sense of humor."

Frazier also misses another coach who moved on, former rush end coach Tony Samuel, now the head coach at New Mexico State.

"Coach Samuel was really laid back," Frazier said. "He called everyone 'Chief. He never got overly excited."

Players trust the NU coaches. One of the reasons, Frazier said, is that the staff has very little turnover, something unique in this era of college football.

"The loyalty toward each other and the commitment to do their job their very best every day is a big part of the success at Nebraska," Frazier said. "They have all stayed for a long time. Most schools are not that way. Only Florida State has a similar staff, one that has been

intact for a long time. Nebraska's coaching staff must lead the country in years at the same school. That is crucial to the program's success and growth. Kids don't want to sign with a college that is going to clean out the whole coaching staff every few years. Players in college don't want one, or even two, coaching changes while they are playing their four years. Because every time you change a coaching staff, you have to basically start rebuilding the program."

The staff was professional, but they weren't often seen hanging around together outside of the office for the most part.

"Let's put it this way," Frazier said. "They all worked well together. Not all of them hung out together after they left practice or games—although some did—but they were great as a group. And there is nothing wrong with not hanging out together outside of work. But in the office or on the field, they were the best."

Another trend Frazier appreciated was that no player was put on a pedestal by the coaching staff or allowed special exceptions or benefits.

"They treat all the players the same," Frazier said. "You might have a few star players on the team, but they get no special treatment. They tell the walk-ons the same thing that they tell the scholarship players: You will get an opportunity. What you make of it is up to you. But you all have the same opportunity."

Even at the high-profile position of quarterback, the impact of the walk-on program is felt.

"Matt Turman and Monte Christo are perfect examples of that," Frazier said. "They ended up playing during the national championship season because they found their roles, did what they were told, improved each week and then stepped in and executed."

The coaching staff's continuity and the success of the walk-on program simply add to the Big Red pride felt around the state.

"The mystique surrounding Nebraska football is centered around pride," Frazier said. "There are no major professional sports teams. The Huskers are the only really big-time team in the state. Since it is so successful and since it epitomizes what the state is about, the fans can identify with it and develop a passion for it."

That's why when people leave Nebraska, they don't stop being Husker fans. They know what the Huskers stand for is more than just football; it is about a way of life."

That way of life becomes reality a half-dozen or so Saturdays during the fall in Lincoln. However, Frazier was not the kind to get too fired up during the famed tunnel march.

"Walking through the tunnel, I didn't pay as much attention to that as most players do," Frazier said. "I had to be focused on what I had to do. I wasn't the kind to get all rowdy and enthused before a game because I had to always keep my focus. It motivates us to hear the music start, and the fans getting louder. It really gets the adrenaline going, and it is intimidating to other teams. They know that they are in a hostile place, and all of the intangibles are working against them."

The reputation Memorial Stadium has developed as a tough place to play makes the Huskers a big target when they hit the road.

"On the road, it was the opposite, all the way," Frazier said. "We were the team everyone wanted to beat. We were the game on every team's schedule where, if they beat us, their season was complete, no matter what happened during the other 10 games."

ALWAYS A WINNER

Tommie Frazier accomplished a lot in his athletic career, from the time he started to his final snap as the starting quarterback for the University of Nebraska.

While the time zone and other logistical factors changed, one thing remained the same: Wherever Frazier was, he won.

"That's Tommie," former Nebraska assistant coach Kevin Steele said. "It's an amazing thing. Go back to pee-wee football; I don't think he lost eight or nine games the whole time even after he graduated from the University of Nebraska. He believed that when the football was snapped to him, he would win."

Frazier does not believe his winning attitude makes him different from any other athlete.

"I got that from my parents because they always wanted us to be successful in anything we do," Tommie said. "Whenever I went on the field, court or track, I expected to win. I don't think that makes me different because anyone who competes should feel the same way."

Steele knew Frazier was a winner from the time they first met.

"His confidence, attitude and his belief in his God-given abilities give him the sense that no matter what happens, he can deliver a win," Steele said.

The pressure that makes many others crumble as their emotional gas tank runs dry only fueled Frazier's fire.

"You can't rattle the guy—that's what makes him special," Steele said. "There are guys who are faster, bigger and stronger. But in terms of the total package of a quarterback, there was none better in college football. The attitude that he brought with him, no matter what he was competing in, basketball, track or baseball...when it

was on the line, he took it to another level. It was something inside of him, something innate. It was just God's gift that was nurtured and pruned and groomed right at home. You can trace that back to his family—his mother and father—too.”

Frazier's perfectionist attitude made those around him better, but it also caused some strife among team members.

“He was a competitor almost to a fault,” said Manatee High School coach Joe Kinnan. “He didn't have a lot of patience for people who didn't work hard. He was a gifted athlete. He had problems showing compassion. He didn't endear himself to a lot of those players. Still, his work ethic was to lead by example, and anything less than your best was not acceptable to Tommie.”

Priscilla said her son didn't mind showing patience. However, in the heat of battle, when there was little time for patience, Tommie showed none. The goal was simple and focused: Win, period.

“If someone dropped a pass, Tommie would get mad and then pick up the yards they needed on the next play by running it himself,” Priscilla said. “Sometimes people wondered why he kept the ball and ran with it so much. But he didn't do it if anyone else was having success running it, or catching his passes. He only took over a game when it was clear no one else could do it. Then he would do it himself to guarantee his team wouldn't lose.”

Regardless of the sport, Tommie's distaste for coming in second was apparent.

“He always believed in winning—he always had to be on the winning team,” Priscilla said. “Tommie always liked the challenge—he was always at his best when the challenge grew bigger. He loved to play ball, period—whether it was a ball that big or small—he just bounced from one sport to the next.”

Tyrone Williams said Frazier's competitiveness was just as prevalent on the basketball court.

“He's a very athletic person,” Williams said. “He had a high skill level in all sports. He's always striving to be excellent—to win, and win by as much as he can. That's where all that competitiveness comes from. He wants to win at whatever he's doing.”

His mother saw early on that while a lot of players avoided the pressure or did not perform well under it, Tommie was different.

"If his team was ever behind, it never got to him," Priscilla said. "Because Tommie always had that enthusiasm. It was like he knew his team would win. His teammates would see that energy, and then they knew they would go their hardest until the final bell rang."

Tony Veland, now with the Broncos, agreed.

"He had a will to win that a lot of people hadn't really seen before," Veland said. "You could see it in his face and in his eyes. He knew that he could affect every play, every game. And he knew he was going to win. The guys around him fed off that."

His high school coach, Kinnan, said Frazier's disdain for losing was apparent on any field, court or high school track.

"Tommie was a winner in everything he did," Kinnan said. "He was a three-sport letterman each year—four sports one year. He was a starter in basketball and lettered in track all four years and went to state. He lettered his junior year in baseball, but broke his thumb on his throwing hand on a slide and decided that playing baseball was not good if he wanted to play college football."

Laurie Little, a close friend and the wife of a former assistant coach at Manatee High, said she was talking about water-skiing when Tommie said, "I can do that." Frazier had never done that before, so Laurie offered to let him prove that he could. The gauntlet of challenge had thus been laid down.

"My dad took him out in the airboat," Laurie said. "Tommie doesn't fish, and he really doesn't like water in general. But he had to prove his point that he could do it. We live on a lake. We thought he was kidding as far as going through with it because he doesn't go in the water. He did it, and was cruising along, doing very well. Then, all of the sudden, he let go and dropped in the water. I yelled, 'What's wrong?' He said, 'What do you mean? I'm done. I skied. I proved my point.' "

PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL

With his college career at Nebraska ending on a high note, Frazier immediately turned his attention to the next challenge: The NFL.

"Tommie would have fit in well in the NFL," Nebraska quarterback coach Turner Gill said. "Like most other quarterbacks he needed to be in a system that was right for him—by that I don't mean an option game, just something that let him throw and use his running skills. Any quarterback needs to be in the system that suits what he does well."

Frazier was invited to the NFL Combine in Indianapolis in February, 1996.

"I went to the NFL Combine in Indianapolis, and it went well in my mind," Frazier said. "I had a lot of teams come watch me throw the ball. That was the only question mark surrounding me. Actually, before the East-West Shrine Game, I got a lot of comments about how I threw the ball much better than they had heard about. After the Combine, my stock seemed like it was really going up. Several teams told me that I had improved my draft standing. A couple of scouts told my agent that I could go as high as the second round. Philadelphia seemed to have the most interest in me. My agent is based in Miami, and he was getting a lot of interest from the Dolphins. Since my agent was there in Miami, he stayed in pretty good contact."

Former Husker Aaron Graham, now with the Arizona Cardinals, also played in the East-West Shrine Game with Frazier.

"We were both playing in the East-West Shrine Game after we had beaten Florida in the Fiesta Bowl," Graham said. "Tommie and I were roommates for the weekend of the Shrine Bowl. The number

of scouts who wanted to see Tommie was just phenomenal—just far above and beyond the number who wanted to see anyone else. That was because they knew about the rest of us, but with Tommie, they needed to find out about how he threw the ball and about his medical situation. So we were laying on our beds in our hotel room, and there was this knock at the door. It was a scout. There was more knocking and then more scouts. Finally, Tommie got up and waved them into the room—there were so many that I couldn't believe they all fit into our room."

"I will remember what happened next for the rest of my life," Graham said. "Tommie stood up in the middle of the room and said, 'Anyone who wants to draft me at a position other than quarterback, don't even think about drafting me at all.' I was like, 'Oh my gosh! What's he saying? These are NFL scouts!' But that just shows you how Tommie is. He always told it straight up, how it was. And you know what? If Tommie would have played for those teams, he'd have won for them, too. Any team that has Tommie Frazier as their quarterback is going to win—that's just how it is."

Frazier showed scouts at the Combine that he had an NFL arm.

"He had a very good, strong arm," Gill said. "Eventually, he learned here to put more touch on the ball. Again, it was the kind of thing where you had to tell him just once."

Former Husker teammate Tyrone Williams, who won a Super Bowl ring with the Packers the year after winning his second national championship ring with the Huskers, plays defensive back. So he knows as much about what it takes to be an NFL quarterback as just about anyone else.

"There's no question Tommie has the skill to play in the NFL," Williams said. "Look at Pittsburgh where (former Colorado quarterback) Kordell Stewart is having success. Tommie has all that kind of ability and did a lot more winning. Tommie can run and throw—he and Kordell have very strong arms, and they are both mobile. Had Tommie not developed those blood clots during the week leading up to the draft, and had been drafted, I think he'd be at least at the same level as Kordell."

Graham, who started the last three games of the 1997 season for the Arizona Cardinals, agrees with Williams.

"If Tommie was healthy, he would be on an NFL team right now," Graham said. "I would want Tommie on my team any day. I have been in the NFL two years now, so it is easier for me to pinpoint what it takes to make it at this level. I can honestly say that Tommie would definitely be able to make it as an NFL quarterback."

However, the clotting problem that had been in remission for more than a year unexpectedly came back.

"Right after the Combine, in early March, I came down with another blood clot," Frazier said. "I felt a lot of pain in my leg. This clot was in a deeper vein. They put me on blood thinners. Having that happen right before the draft was tough."

Frazier took solace in the fact that the reason he was not drafted had absolutely nothing to do with his football skills.

"I knew that the reason I would not be drafted was not because of football, but because of the problem with the blood clot," Frazier said. "I talked to Kevin Steele, who was with the Carolina Panthers, and he said they were going to take me if I was still around in the third round. But there's nothing I can do about my health. I had done everything I could to put myself in a position to be in the NFL."

The fateful day leading up to the draft was April 18, 1996. With only three days until the draft, Tommie was despondent that he would likely not be selected. However, his perspective was refocused when the ultimate tragedy occurred: Brook Berringer, piloting a small plane, died when it crashed in rural Nebraska.

"Brook died in the plane crash, and it was so awful," Frazier said. "That was just a hard time with everything going on—what happened that day showed me I have a lot to be thankful for, and that I should not feel sorry for myself when it comes to football."

Frazier will never forget the day of the crash.

"I was on a photo shoot for Adidas," Frazier said. "It was Tony Veland, Jeff Makovicka and me. Someone came and said Brook was in a plane crash. I did not believe it. I went back to my room and watched the news. It was true. I prayed a lot that night."

As soon as he learned of Berringer's death, the first person then-Nebraska assistant coach Kevin Steele called was Frazier.

"Tommie and Brook had been through so much together, sitting in the same room for meetings and then hours each day in the same group at practice," Steele said. "Tommie was as saddened as anyone."

The feelings Frazier had been experiencing relating to the loss of his football career was tempered by the emotions he knew the Berringer family had to deal with from that day forward.

"That made me look at things differently," Frazier said. "Death is only a day away. It made me realize nothing is sure in life. The only thing you are guaranteed is that you will die some day."

On April 17, almost 24 hours to the hour before Brook died, Frazier and he had chatted on campus.

"I had seen Brook the day before," Frazier said. "We were both in a hurry—I remember I was late for something. Brook asked me how the Combine went. He had gone, too, but he was in a different group. He was pretty happy because he did so well. He had that big smile that everyone remembers so well. It was neat because Brook and I both surprised a lot of people at the Combine and really improved our standing with the NFL scouts."

This story, written by Bob Schaller, appeared in the *Scottsbluff Star-Herald* April 14, 1996. Brook Berringer was in Scottsbluff April 13 to sign autographs in Scottsbluff, the western Nebraska town in which Berringer was born. Berringer died four days later in a plane crash in rural Raymond, Nebraska, just two days before the NFL Draft.

BERRINGER ALWAYS "SHOWS UP" FOR HUSKERS

Brook Berringer smiled as a boy tried to wrestle a football out of its box for Berringer to autograph.

"That's all right," Berringer said. "I can sign it right through there."

Berringer, who was born in Scottsbluff on July 9, 1973, found a

way to sign the ball Saturday. Ironically, that's what Berringer's been doing on the football field the last two years as well—taking what's thrown at him, and dealing with it.

Saturday, Berringer was in town for a promotional visit to the Nothin' But Nebraska shop.

During the Huskers run to Coach Tom Osborne's first national championship, Berringer came off the bench during NU's romp over Pacific after Tommie Frazier left with what turned out to be a blood clot. Berringer guided the Huskers to eight consecutive wins to end the regular season. He threw for more than 140 yards in five of those games, including a 267-yard effort against Kansas. But Frazier came back and gained MVP honors in the Orange Bowl while leading Nebraska to a national title over Miami.

So it was back to the bench for Berringer this year as Frazier took the reins and grabbed a second national title for Nebraska.

"It was frustrating," Berringer said. "Perseverance—I've learned that more than anything at Nebraska. But I kept it all in perspective."

That perspective is now focused on a week from today: The NFL Draft. Berringer has been told he could go as high as the third or fourth round.

"Somewhere in the middle (of the draft) would be nice," Berringer said.

Although his stock hasn't featured the meteoric rise like Lawrence Phillips' has since the season ended, Berringer helped himself greatly at the NFL Combine and in workouts for teams. Berringer has worked out for 14 NFL teams. Listed at 6-foot-4, 220 pounds, Berringer has added five to 10 pounds of muscle working out since the season ended. He is the perfect, prototypical size for drop-back NFL quarterbacks. And he has a kind of speed that has impressed NFL scouts and coaches.

"I haven't had any doubts about my ability," Berringer said. "I'm happy to prove that to people."

More than that, Berringer knows the way he carries himself on and off the field, and through the so-called quarterback controversy, will do nothing but help him come draft day.

"I think the NFL is obviously looking for someone who has a lot of ability," Berringer said. "But they also want a good leader who is going to be a good person in the community. Hopefully, that's me."

One of the teams Berringer worked out for was the Kansas City Chiefs. A native of Goodland, Kansas, Berringer would welcome a chance with the Chiefs, who have at least one, and possibly two, roster spots open at quarterback.

"That'd be nice—to get the opportunity to go down there and play," Berringer said.

But he is quick to add that he would welcome the chance to play for any NFL team.

"It will be nice to be out in the real world and make some money," Berringer said. "Hopefully, I will get that opportunity."

He leaves Nebraska with two national championship rings. While his role was limited during last season's campaign, there's little disputing that Nebraska wouldn't have even been in a position to talk about "Repeat" had Berringer not been there to guide the Big Red through the murky waters of 1994.

"That's something you dream of," Berringer said of the rings. "I never thought of getting two of them, back to back. I'm very proud of that."

He speaks of "opportunity" and "perspective" several times. That "perspective" has afforded Berringer many opportunities. He won't lose that perspective in the NFL—or anywhere else—for that matter.

"I have been at the top, so to speak, and I've been at the other end," Berringer said. "I improved and learned a lot at Nebraska."

A family surrounded Berringer Saturday evening as he stayed well past the time he was obligated to. The family needed two hats signed. Berringer picked up his black pen, but the mother pointed out how the hats were both black as well.

Berringer smiled and signed—the ink was silver and showed up perfectly.

Just like Brook Berringer always did for the Huskers.

On draft day, the last thing Frazier wanted to think about was the NFL.

"You know what I did draft day? I was at the Spring Game at Memorial Stadium," Frazier said. "My agent said if we got a call, he knew how to get a hold of me. I spoke at halftime about the DARE program."

After NFL training camps started, Frazier again received a clean bill of health. The Canadian Football League thought it suited Frazier's strong arm, strong running skills. So Frazier signed with the Montreal Alouettes.

"I went to Montreal after my leg had healed," Frazier said. "The game was different, with the wider field and a few different rules. But it was still football. I played in two games. We had a quarterback, Tracy Ham, who was in the CFL for 11 years and won some Grey Cups, so he had a lot of experience, and he was the starter."

Football in Canada brought Frazier the opportunity to play professional football. The Montreal Alouettes of the Canadian Football League signed Frazier in August.

"In the CFL when you are an American player, they don't draft you," Frazier said. "Each team says they want the rights to certain players if they don't make it to the NFL. Saskatchewan had my rights. When they found out about the blood-clotting problem, they traded my rights to Montreal. My agent contacted Montreal and said I was interested in playing. So they signed me to a one-year deal."

Signing with Montreal brought change: The field was wider and longer (110-yard field with a 20-yard end zone) and there were other subtle, and not so subtle, differences between American college/pro football and the Canadian Football League.

"I thought it was a lot more fun up there because of the wide field," Frazier said. "There were 12 guys on the field at a time, which is one more than college football and the NFL allow. The receivers could take a running start at the line of scrimmage before the snap in the CFL. You could have several players in motion, whereas here you can only have one guy in motion at a time."

Frazier had to adjust to a new kind of offense because of the odd numbers in the lineup.

"You couldn't run the option much up there with 12 guys on the field, so you didn't have an unbalanced side, which you use when you run the option," Frazier said.

While he was in a foreign country, he knew several of the players and coaches.

"I knew their quarterback Tracy Ham," Frazier said. "The defensive coordinator, David Ritchey, had coached Ron Brown when Coach Brown was at Brown University," Frazier said. "Peter Vaas was their offensive coordinator, and he was a coach at Notre Dame when they recruited me."

A late signee, Frazier jumped right in as the season started.

"They were playing their final preseason game when I signed, so I didn't make it to their training camp," Frazier said. "Still, it was a higher level of football, and that's what I was after at that time. The different rules made it more fun."

With Ham gone attending a funeral, Frazier took over as the starting quarterback for two games. The first was against the two-time defending Grey Cup champion Toronto Argonauts and their MVP quarterback, Doug Flutie.

"I handled myself well, even though it was my first game," Frazier said. "I had a few passes I could have thrown better, and I could have made some better audible calls. That's just how it goes. Some games you play better than in others. I only talked briefly to Flutie afterward because we had to catch a train back to Montreal."

While Frazier is not sure how Flutie will fare in the NFL—Flutie was about to begin his second NFL stint in 1998—he was an excellent CFL quarterback.

"Flutie was very good," Frazier said. "He knew the game. And up there, a lot of it is just knowing the game. We lost by five points. That wasn't too bad, considering Toronto was the best team in the CFL at that time. I was rushing things too much. I wasn't taking my time because I was excited. It was a low-scoring game, and our defense really kept us in it. Flutie didn't have the strongest arm, but

he knew the receivers well. For the offense they ran, he was a perfect fit—the key to making it work.”

Another former NFL player had a big influence on the outcome of that game.

“Robert Drummond, who used to play for the Philadelphia Eagles, played for Toronto,” Frazier said. “He weighed about 230 pounds. He made one run that was just unbelievable. He went through a hole at the line of scrimmage and no one could catch him. He didn’t really make any moves or anything. He just bounced off of one tackle, and he was gone.”

Playing in Toronto’s SkyDome in August was not a day that made as big of an impression on Frazier as he thought it would, considering it was his professional debut.

“It wasn’t that cold at that time of the year, plus the game was inside at the SkyDome,” Frazier said. “I think the SkyDome is overrated. Lincoln has better hotels than the one we stayed at in the SkyDome.”

Still, Frazier was quickly growing comfortable with the coaching staff in Montreal.

“I liked Coach Vohrs,” Frazier said. “He was a player’s coach. When you made a mistake, he talked to you about what happened, why it happened and what you could do differently the next time. He never dwelled on it or anything.”

So Frazier focused on his next game, less than a week later at Ottawa against the Roughriders.

“We played Ottawa a couple of days later,” Frazier said. “We lost by 10 points. Man, I hate losing. It was just one of those things where we didn’t play well, and Ottawa had a lot on the line. Ottawa had to sell out to keep the franchise because their organization was on the verge of bankruptcy.”

That experience reminded Frazier of his first year in Lincoln.

“Actually, it was like when we played Iowa State my freshman year at Nebraska,” Frazier said. “We were favored against Ottawa, and they had nothing to lose and everything to gain..”

Again Frazier felt himself making strides despite the loss.

"I learned a lot that game," Frazier said. "Mostly, to keep my patience."

Frazier was not growing fonder of Montreal, even though he thought he was getting the hang of the CFL and saw a lot of promise ahead.

"I didn't like Montreal, but I can't say the same thing about the rest of Canada because I really didn't get to experience it enough," Frazier said. "If I had been living in Vancouver, Edmonton or Ottawa, it could have been different."

What could have been never was. Only two days after the Ottawa game, Frazier was back in the hospital. His pro football career had come to an end.

Because suddenly, without any warning, Frazier was stricken again. One doctor said it was a blood clot in his lung, the other labeled it pneumonia.

"I still, to this day, don't know what the truth was," Frazier said. "What I did know was that I was not getting the medical treatment I needed. I was in the hospital, and my girlfriend was there. I was in intense pain and hitting the call button, and it took 45 minutes for someone to come after I hit the call button. My girlfriend went to the nurses station, and the person on duty was reading a magazine. My lungs were hurting so bad. So I voided my contract to come back and to see my doctor. The medical system is different up there. The health system is all paid for by the state in Canada, so you are just a number. They get to you when they get to you."

Frazier came back to Lincoln, got healthy and was ready to move on with his life.

"I worked with the Husker broadcast team that year," Frazier said. "That was a lot of fun. I want to go into broadcasting. They need people who understand the game and the changes it has gone through. A lot of the broadcasters who have been around for a long time don't understand the modern version of the game. I feel like I can bring something special to broadcasting. But I will be patient. I will do all I can to get into that field, and if it is meant to be, it will happen. Just getting in the door is the important thing now."

Take away the clotting condition and Kinnan sees Frazier playing "professional football" today.

"It's a shame about the physical thing because there is no doubt in my mind that he could have played in the NFL," Kinnan said. "But you are always one play away from not being able to compete anymore."

SPRINTING INTO THE "REAL WORLD"

In September of 1997, Frazier, arguably one of the most recognizable people in Nebraska during the mid-1990s, entered the field of politics.

"I went to work for the office of Nebraska governor Ben Nelson," Frazier said. "That was fun, and I learned a lot. I am a Democrat, and I am not afraid to talk about it. Look at what the Democrats have done—taxes have gone down."

He landed the job through a chance meeting.

"It was funny how I ended up working for the governor," Frazier said. "I was at Sapp City, right outside of Omaha. Lee Sapp was opening a bank there, and the governor was there to give a speech. He walked up, and we started talking. He asked if I had an interest in politics or if I wanted to see how things worked. I told him that I had not thought about it, but if the opportunity came up, I might be interested. He said he might have an opening coming up. So I sent my resume in, and ended up getting the job."

The governor put Frazier right to work, which was twofold in helping Frazier; it took his mind off football and indoctrinated Frazier to how politics and the legislature work.

"I got along well with him—Governor Nelson and I talked quite a bit," Frazier said. "I was there in October when we had that really bad storm. I was at the office an hour earlier than usual, at 7 a.m. I had to type up press releases and let them know what the governor and lieutenant governor said. I had to let the media know when money would be available and how the cleanup was going. I took hundreds of phone calls that day."

Frazier said he learned a lot about dealing with the public from Nelson. "Governor Nelson was sincere with everyone he met,"

Frazier said. "He went the extra mile to please everyone. Of course, you can't please everyone, but he always went the extra mile. He did his best with everyone. I learned from him how to be kind to everyone, even if it was someone I didn't particularly like. He had a smile for everyone.

"All the traveling he did was the part of the job I would not have enjoyed. He was gone several days a week and didn't get to spend much time with his family. Plus, his schedule was set much in advance, so he knew he was going to be on the road quite a bit."

The experience opened Frazier's eyes to a part of society that he had little interest in, or knowledge about, prior to joining Nelson's staff.

"I learned so much about politics, what goes on inside government," Frazier said. "You hear how politicians are crooked. But there are so many honest, hard-working people—there might be some bad ones—but there are a lot of good people. I learned how a law passes and goes into effect, who does the leg work, that kind of thing. Also, I was able to meet most of the state senators. My last day at the governor's office was Dec. 10, 1997."

Frazier left the governor's office on good terms. A job with much potential and room for growth came his way through another football connection.

"The reason why I left is because the job I have now came up," Frazier said. "Mary Lyn Wininger, who was Coach Osborne's secretary and is now Coach Solich's secretary, called me at the governor's office. She told me that her husband and some people had started a new phone company. She asked if I was interested. I said I was, and the next thing I know they hired me. I am the director of public relations and marketing. The company has just started up. We have now added another staff position. It's very exciting because the company has just started, it's growing and I am a part of it. I handle all the advertising and marketing. I go to all the new areas where we are expanding and see what the people want in terms of service and products. I come up with the slogans and the marketing plans. I get to travel a lot for the company. Being who I

am is an advantage and a disadvantage. It is an advantage because people know me, and they will let me in the door to give them a pitch about my company and what we are trying to do. But sometimes, people just want an autograph or to talk football."

Frazier said he has learned a lot about corporate America. Coupled with his knowledge of college sports and politics from his stint in the governor's office, Frazier is proud of the way his resume is filling out only two years removed from college. He is enjoying his job, but keeping his eye open as other opportunities come his way.

"I plan to do this until I see another field or job that interests me," Frazier said. "This is an exciting field with a bright future for the right company. I want to have a family and kids. I want to make enough money where my kids won't ever have to struggle."

His sister also sees a winner, whether her brother is on the football field, or simply the field of life.

"His personality, his train of thought, his attitude—all those things will help him in life, whether he is playing football or not," Darcy said.

Tom Osborne said Frazier's abilities in football translate well to the business world.

"He doesn't seem to have a great interest in coaching, but maybe he will," Osborne said. "He seems to be more interested in business right now, and he's doing well. He has good values, a strong spiritual commitment; he has good judgment, and he's bright. He's a person who has a lot of leadership skills. He'll do well."

Frazier is still sort of a loner, choosing to spend time alone at home working or talking on the phone to his family in Florida.

"I am a pretty quiet, low-key person. I spend a lot of time with my girlfriend," Frazier said. "When I am not with her, I am at home, either playing on my computer or listening to music. I listen to rhythm and blues mostly—I am not a real big rap fan. There are some rappers out there whom I like, and there are others whom I can't believe are allowed to record those kind of lyrics, even taking the First Amendment into consideration. Some guys would listen to heavy metal or hardcore rap before games to get fired up. Not me,

I had an R&B song on. I had to be focused. I did not want to get all fired up."

There is also a very soft side to Frazier, one not seen by many.

"My son, Cody, was in kindergarten," Rod Little said. "His class was doing a letter of the alphabet each day. The day before they were going to do 'T,' my son asked, 'Can I bring the T this week?' Because the kids had to bring something—for C it was a cup, for B it was a ball, and so on. So Cody wants to do 'T.' His teacher said yes. Cody called Tommie to bring as the 'T.' Tyrone Williams was there, so he came, too. I just thought it was so nice that they could take time out of their day to be the 'T' for a kindergarten class. Tommie does that kind of thing all the time. Every time he gets the chance, Tommie is there. He is very family-oriented. The class got quite a kick out of it."

During Cody's first-grade year, he had an art teacher who had just transferred to Cody's school, so she didn't know Cody at all. The kids were told to draw their family. Cody drew his parents, his brother and Tommie.

"The teacher came over and said, 'Cody, that's good, but that guy is Tommie Frazier, the quarterback for Nebraska; he is not your brother,' " Rod said. "Cody looked up and said, 'Oh yes, he is my big brother.' "

The Littles have been like a second family to Frazier, who gladly takes the responsibility and commitment that comes along with it.

"Whenever we have family functions, we call him," Rod's wife, Laurie Little said. "My niece plays for Papillion's basketball team. They made it to the state high school playoffs in 1998. She was a freshman, so going to state was a big deal to her. Tommie showed up on a really busy work night for him. That meant a lot to me. I hope he never leaves Lincoln because then we would have to move, too!"

Former roommate Aaron Davis, who played for the Huskers, said Tommie was a celebrity from the day he arrived in Lincoln.

"At first he got so much attention it was overwhelming," Davis said. "I mean, it was almost to the point that if Tommie Frazier used

the bathroom, it made the news. He isolated himself a lot of the time to keep his own identity. He could not go out in public with his friends a lot because everyone knew who he was."

Kevin Steele said Frazier was not unfriendly, he just liked to be alone a lot more than most college kids.

"The thing with Tommie is not that he doesn't like to be around people," Steele said. "He just doesn't like crowds. He's not a person who has to have a lot of people around him. That is not the norm for college-age kids because most people are in groups all the time. Tommie just likes to be alone. It relates back to the fact that his mother and father made him so accountable in whom he hung around with—he has a close circle of friends because he is careful whom he associates with. But make no mistake; there's nothing he wouldn't do for those he is close to."

Davis said Frazier simply does not allow a lot of people close to him because he could not develop a real relationship with the thousands of people he met over the years in Lincoln.

"He was raised right—he came from a good home," Davis said. "His mother was very instrumental in Tommie being very independent and sure of himself. People still take Tommie the wrong way. It might seem like he's not excited when he meets people. But for the past six or seven years, he's lived in a huge fishbowl. That would be hard. He kept the same values as he matured as a person. The way he treated people never changed."

Still, Frazier always made time for his friends.

"He has never changed in the way that he treats people—I was a no-namer, and we were good friends when we first met, and we're even better friends now," Davis said. "But with me, like almost all of Tommie's really close friends, the relationship is not about football. He is really a sensitive person. He cares a lot about his friends."

What happened to Brook Berringer—and Frazier's own medical problems—have forever changed his outlook on life.

"I live life each day and take everything as it comes," Frazier said. "Life is short. I try to live every day to the fullest. I pray every night to thank God for that day and that I will wake up in the morning."

Coaching is something Frazier has considered at times.

"I have thought a lot about coaching, and I do have an interest in it," Frazier said. "I am still young, and I have my whole life to live. The knowledge I have of the game will never leave me. That is why I am not worried about it. If a quarterback coaching job came open next year and someone called me, I would consider doing it. There was a rumor that Nebraska was going to offer me a graduate assistant job. But that was just a rumor. No one contacted me about it. It's something that won't happen until it happens."

Kinnan sees a coaching career in Frazier's future as well.

"Tommie definitely has the intensity and the knowledge of the game a coach needs," Kinnan said. "He has that temperament of a coach in a lot of ways. I've always told our kids, 'You don't have to like me, but you'll respect me.' I've had players that I have not particularly liked, but they've been good players."

Steele said he thinks Frazier would be an outstanding coach.

"He has a great knowledge of the game," Steele said. "And being how he is, he would deal well with the talented players who have strong wills—I think he would identify and deal with those players very well. I know if I ever got a head coaching job, the first person I would hire is Tommie Frazier."

Still, Frazier knows he might have left the field for a final time. It is neither unexpected nor crisis-provoking for Frazier to consider the possibility of life without football.

"I knew that someday football was not going to be in my life," Frazier said. "I was not expecting that day to be this soon. And when it happened that football was no longer there, it was hard. But the more time I am away from it, the easier it gets. Now I can honestly say that if I never play another down of football, I will be fine. I feel fortunate in some ways for that because I have seen and heard how athletes have a hard time walking away from the game. I have been able to learn a lot about the business world and politics, and I am only 23 years old."

One thing Frazier does not want is for people to think that life without football for him is a bad sort of life. Just the opposite is true.

"I do not seek sympathy from anyone," Frazier said. "I appreciate people's thoughts. But when people come up and say, 'I'm so sorry you can't play football anymore,' that kind of bothers me. That is just life. Pro football has not been in the cards for me. It's just like rolling the dice in craps. If you roll a seven or 11, you win. If you throw a two, three or 12, you lose. That's just the way it goes. Not being able to play football any longer was not in my control. But don't feel sorry for me because I am lucky. And I am happy. I was able to play football for one of the greatest colleges in the country, for the greatest coach ever and the greatest coaching staff, and I had the best teammates you could ask for. And we won two national championships—so how can you feel sorry for someone who has done that?"

The fact that he went to a college like Nebraska, played for someone like Coach Tom Osborne and was in a state like Nebraska where the people truly cared about him prepared him for life in every way imaginable.

"The state of Nebraska and the university are two of the best things that have happened to me," Frazier said. "The people of this state have embraced me and have continued to care about me long after my career as a Husker ended. People still come up to me and tell me how glad they are that I stayed in Nebraska when I was done playing."

He feels the bond he has with Nebraskans was built around a common goal; an undying will to win and represent Nebraska proudly.

"When I first came to Nebraska, I was shocked at how the people live and die with the Huskers," Frazier said. "When we win, life is good. When we lose, it's like there was a death in the family. That is part of the reason I am so proud of what we accomplished in winning two titles. I was fortunate to play the game I love for a crowd and state that appreciates someone who wants to win so badly."

Still, Frazier won't go so far as to close the door on a possible return to the football field, either as a coach or player.

TOUCHDOWN TOMMIE

“Football is something I don’t think about that much,” Frazier said. “Still, if the doctor gave me clearance and a team showed a lot of interest and wanted me, I would not turn it down. But either way, with football or without it, I will be happy.”

WATCHING OSBORNE LEAVE IN STYLE

A Lincoln television station asked Frazier to join its sports team to cover the 1998 Orange Bowl, where Coach Osborne and the No. 2-ranked Huskers would go for a third national championship in four years against No. 3-ranked Tennessee.

"I was able to cover the Orange Bowl game with Tennessee," Frazier said. "It meant a lot to see Coach Osborne win his third national championship."

Frazier knows the comparisons being made between himself and Scott Frost were not easy for either player.

"I tried to stay away and not comment when people were comparing Scott Frost and me," Frazier said. "That's not fair to Scott because he had to make his own name, which he did. In the '98 season, they will compare Frankie London or Bobby Newcombe to Scott Frost. That's how it will always be at Nebraska."

Frazier knows Frost had big expectations to step into when he took over the team.

"I know Scott went through a tough situation," Frazier noted. "He said how tough it was to only be able to play two years—that he wished he would have been able to be a Husker the full four years. But he is the one who made the decision to leave and go to Stanford. Nebraska wanted him here. Nebraska recruited him and offered him a scholarship, so they did not want him to leave. If he had stuck around instead of going to the west coast, maybe he would not have had the problems the first year he took over the team. From what I hear, when you are one of the top players in Nebraska, the thing to do is stay here and play for Nebraska. So no one at Nebraska told Scott not to come here; he thought Stanford

gave him a better shot at playing in the NFL. I respect his right to make his own decision, but it was his decision.”

Frazier said Frost truly came into his own for the 1997 season and showed a lot of determination in guiding the Huskers past Missouri in overtime, even though the narrow escape cost Nebraska the Associated Press’ (writers’ poll) share of the national championship.

“The 1997 season was different than 1996,” Frazier said. “Of course, Nebraska has enough talent to compete for a national championship every year. So 1997 would be no different. Scott really came on strong. I was at the Tennessee game, and I thought Scott played extremely well. He’s a big, fast, tough and strong quarterback.”

Frazier drew the wrath of at least some Nebraska fans when he was asked who should be No. 1, Nebraska or Michigan. Frazier said the Wolverines should not lose the No. 1 ranking because they won their bowl game.

“A lot was said about me saying how Michigan, which was ranked No. 1, should be No. 1 if they beat Washington State,” Frazier said. “Penn State was undefeated, and we weren’t looking to share the national title with them in 1994. The reason I said that about Michigan staying No. 1 had nothing to do with Nebraska’s overtime win over Missouri. Look at Michigan and how they struggled with Wisconsin. So, no, the close call in Missouri had nothing to do with my statements. The way I was brought up was that if you were No. 1 going into a game and you won—whether it was by one point, three points, 10 points or more—you should stay No. 1. I believe that. I am not saying Nebraska was not deserving because they were. Of course I wanted Nebraska to win a share of the national championship. But if I had to vote, the way I viewed it was that No. 1 won, so they have to stay No. 1. People don’t like me saying that, but it is just what I believe. There are times when you go in a direction that seems to be against your school because of something you believe in.”

And if that sounds unthinkable, get ready for this: If the Huskers

face the Gators in the near future, Frazier will be pulling for Steve Spurrier's team.

"If Nebraska plays Florida next year, I will root for Florida because my brother is there," Frazier said. "I will root for Nebraska against anyone else. And when my brother graduates from Florida, I will root for Nebraska when they play the Gators."

Frazier claims there is a precedent for such a thing.

"Look at what happened with Sterling Sharpe last season," Frazier said. "He played for the Green Bay Packers for his whole career. But his brother plays for the Denver Broncos. So when the Packers played the Broncos in the Super Bowl, who did Sterling root for? The Broncos, his brother's team."

All that said, no one was pulling harder for the Huskers in the 1998 Orange Bowl than Tommie Frazier.

"I am happy that Nebraska beat Tennessee and earned a share of the national championship," Frazier said. "I am very glad about that. That's why it did not bother me that people were questioning my loyalty to Nebraska. After the 1994 season we Nebraskans were adamant that Penn State did not deserve to be No. 1. My thoughts had nothing to do with loyalty; I will always pull for Nebraska, and I hope we win the national championship every year. But every one is entitled to their opinion, and I would never chastise anyone for their opinion."

REFLECTIONS FROM A SPECIAL ERA

Nebraska had a chance to win the national championship for Frazier's four years, 1992 through 1995, and then in both 1996 and 1997, winning titles in 1994 and 1995 and then, of course, during Osborne's final year in 1997. Frazier said the rest of the college football world will do a good enough imitation of Nebraska to level the playing field and bring either themselves to Nebraska, or Nebraska back to the rest of the pack.

"Eventually, the rest of the country will catch up to Nebraska," Frazier said. "Just like when schools were chasing Miami and Florida State—after seven years or so, they caught up. This run at Nebraska will end. The thing is, are fans prepared for when it does end? Nebraska fans have been spoiled. You can't win all the time. When you win and win and win, that's what people expect. But you can only stay on the top for so long. But as soon as the program comes down, it will go back up. It's a cycle, just like it always has been in college football."

Leaving the field for good after the experience in Montreal has been tough at times. It also kept Frazier from being able to feel right about approaching the University of Nebraska about rejoining the program in some capacity. He doesn't think it would be fair to the current players, especially the quarterbacks, to have him looking over their shoulder.

"I was able to walk away from the game and feel good about it," Frazier said. "I did not hang around the team after my career at Nebraska ended. Some people find that hard to do. It was not hard for me. It was time to move on. I tried to put as much space between myself and the program as I possibly could. The attention should be on the players who are still there. I see players around town and

they say, 'Where have you been? I haven't seen you in ages.' I have been around Lincoln, but the players who are there deserve the attention, not me."

One person Frazier does miss associating with on a day-to-day basis is Tom Osborne, who has also left the football field for a final time. Frazier is glad to see Osborne will be able to spend more time with his family, something Frazier has given a lot of thought to lately.

"Some day, I want to get married and have kids," Frazier said. "I learned a lot from Coach Osborne, and sometimes I am asked how I will apply that as a father and husband. But I learned that from my parents. They raised us right, and I will use that when I take on those roles. That implies no disrespect whatsoever to Coach Osborne because he is a great person and family man."

Football still crosses Frazier's mind more days than not, especially when the fall rolls around and both the NFL and college football programs are getting started.

"I think about football," Frazier said. "But a lot of things would have to happen for me to get back into it. It would involve my doctors, my agents, the NFL coaches and my parents. If my parents told me not to do it, then I probably would not do it."

Although he has been away from the Husker football program for two years, Frazier still gets asked to speak to schools and other kids' groups. It is a role he enjoys and welcomes, taking the responsibility of being a role model and running with it to help kids see that sports are not all there is to life.

"I have always been a leader, not a follower," Frazier said. "I have always taken being a role model seriously. If I can help people and help kids feel good about themselves, I will do that. Being a leader means being able to take criticism and dish it out in the proper manner. There are leaders who are quiet, some who lead by example, and there are the kind who are very outspoken. I always tried to lead quietly and by example. Most of my success came not from physical talent, but from mental skills. If I knew what a team was going to throw at me, I had them beat right there. The whole

thing about the game is not being the most athletic—it's how smart you are on the field. I think that's why I had a lot of teams at my mercy. I knew what they were going to throw at me and when they were going to do that. I studied a lot of film and wasn't surprised. The ability to scrutinize other teams and anticipate their moves came with time. My freshman year, it was hard. My sophomore year, I got better at it. My junior and senior year, they could throw nothing at me that I was not prepared for. If Coach Osborne would have let me, I could have called the whole game myself."

While the demand placed upon student-athletes, especially at major colleges, receives a lot of attention, Frazier said the opportunity is manageable.

"Football is more like a part-time job that feels like a full-time job," Frazier said. "Once you are done practicing, you feel like you have been there all day. It's one of those things where you have to balance everything. You are in school until just after lunch, and then you may have another class and then team meetings early in the afternoon. After that, it's practice until almost 6 p.m. After practice, you have to dedicate yourself to studying. That's what makes or breaks a student-athlete—what are you going to do after practice?"

While many students claim to be constantly swamped under a sea of academic and athletic commitments, Frazier had a different experience.

"I'm not going to sit here and say I studied for five or six hours every single night because I didn't," Frazier said. "There were some nights when I just didn't feel like studying, so I didn't. But on the nights when I had to, I put in the time and did the work. Everyone knows what he has to do as far as academics are concerned. Even though we get a lot of support from the teachers and coaches, we have to motivate and push ourselves. If you can't do that, you won't be around long. If you do know what it takes and you are willing to put in the time and concentrate, you will make it. You will apply yourself, and you will succeed."

The University of Nebraska, Frazier said, gives its student athletes every opportunity to succeed.

"No matter what sport you played—and regardless of whether you were a walk-on or a big-name recruit—you have to go to study hall when you are a freshman at Nebraska," Frazier said. "That's from 7:30 to 9:30 four nights a week. Right there, it was strictly studying. As a freshman, study hall is where I did almost all of my studying. It was quiet; I had access to computers and had good tutoring available."

After his freshman year, Frazier felt like he had a good grasp on what he had to do to experience success in the classroom while still excelling on the football field.

"My last three years, I didn't have to go to study hall," Frazier said. "But I still used my time wisely. After practice, I would rest for an hour and then study for two hours. It was all a matter of time management. You don't have to study all night, every night. You can study for an hour or two every night—you don't have to, and shouldn't, stay up all night. If you are organized and stay on top of things, you will make it and probably even excel."

The challenges facing a college student-athlete require an adjustment for former high school students.

"When you are in high school, you don't worry about time management because everything is so easy," Frazier said. "You can wake up in the morning and do your homework before you go to school. In college it's not that way. In college you don't go to class every day, so you have to study every day because professors don't spend several classes on one topic."

The time-management skills Frazier honed during college are what he claims he uses the most today.

"The most important thing I learned in college was how to use my time wisely—that's the most important thing anyone learns in college," Frazier said. "Actually, it's one of the most important things in life. If you use your time wisely, you will be successful at whatever you do in life. I use that every day, whether it's leaving myself enough time to go somewhere or planning for meetings or trips."

However, running down a typical day for Frazier—even though he calls it quite manageable—still sounds formidable.

"My freshman year, I would get up at 7:30, take a shower and eat whatever we had in our dorm room before I went to class at 8:30," Frazier said. "I would be in class until 12:30, and then it was time for lunch. After lunch I got taped and went to meetings. We had quarterback meetings from 2 p.m. to 3:15. We got on the field for practice at 3:30, and then we practiced until almost 6 p.m. Then we lifted weights, showered, ate dinner and later studied."

According to Frazier, success in college, especially academically, is the student's own choice.

"Academically, it's not as big of a challenge as it is made out to be for college athletes," Frazier said. "I just don't think it's that hard. Student-athletes get into trouble and encounter problems because they don't apply themselves. They have all the help they could want or need, but they don't end up taking advantage of it. For a student-athlete to say it's hard to juggle the two—academics and sports—is just a cop out, or an excuse. It's all about applying yourself. If you want to play football, you have to work in the classroom. The ones who struggle in school are the ones who don't try as hard as they need to, and they also don't use the resources the university provides to help them academically."

And that care and accessibility extends to all students.

"The teachers in Lincoln treated me no differently than any other student—which was how I wanted it, too," Frazier said. "That was important to me; that the teachers knew I have the ability upstairs, in my head. I wanted to prove myself in the classroom. I wanted to go to class and earn my grades."

Frazier, as his sister Darcy said, could have completed his studies in fewer than four years. However, considering Frazier did not redshirt—and factoring in the two-plus months that he was hospitalized during his junior year with the blood clots—graduating on time (four years) seems even more impressive.

"I probably could have graduated in three years, had I not played football," Frazier said. "But I had to be realistic, as far as graduating in four years, because to graduate in three years would have affected football."

Even as Frazier prepared for the NFL Combine as a senior, his parents asked first and foremost about academics.

"My family and teachers didn't care about the NFL," Frazier said. "They knew that the degree is what stays with me forever and will help me make it for the long run in life."

Neither the Combine nor anything else slowed down Frazier's academic progress during his final years as a student-athlete.

"I thought the last two years of college were easier and more fun than the first year or two," Frazier said. "By the time you are a junior, you are taking classes in your major, what really interests you. So there are no more pitty-pat classes."

The hardest part student-athletes have to survive is the initial shock and adjustment period as freshmen.

"I found my junior and senior years to be a lot easier than the first two years of college because back then, as a freshman especially, I was still adjusting to being away from home," Frazier said.

Although it is critical for student-athletes to keep their focus, Frazier said they should not place limits on what they expect to achieve.

"I would tell any student-athlete entering college to set their goals high," Frazier said. "If they are shooting for the NFL, that's fine—I would never tell anyone not to shoot for a goal because that's what life is all about, setting goals and accomplishing them. But I would also tell them, from experience, to plan for the future, whether it includes football or not."

The UNL faculty was always willing to discuss Frazier's off-the-field future.

"One of my teachers, Veronica Duncan, who moved on from UNL to Georgia, always talked about academics and my non-football future with me," Frazier said. "We talked a lot about broadcasting. The faculty in Lincoln deserves a lot of credit and recognition. I could talk for hours about the concern and direction I received from professors and advisers at the University of Nebraska. It's just a collection of first-rate people who care first, and only, about the students and the students' futures."

Many of those professors are among the hundreds Frazier has logged in a data bank—a mega-rolodex of sorts.

“One thing I have always done is to save numbers and business cards whenever I meet someone,” Frazier said. “I have a collection going back to when I first came to Nebraska. You never know when you will need to contact someone in a certain field somewhere down the line. This way, I have people whom I can call that I have met, whereas had I not saved the number, I’d be going through the phone book and making a ‘cold call.’ And that works both ways—I have given my number to people, too, and I would expect them to call if I could ever help them. Now that I have built that data bank up, I use it literally almost every day.”

All of the support and success he received and experienced off the field have only reinforced Frazier’s belief that he is fortunate, regardless of the strife he survived because of the medical problems.

“I know I am very blessed with how things worked out,” Frazier said. “Up until my junior year at Nebraska, I had never missed a game in any sport because of an injury or illness. But my medical problems allowed me to focus on life after football. One way or another—whether I played in the NFL or not—that day would have come eventually. Sure, it came sooner than I wanted it to, but that day was still on the horizon.”

Lincoln might be a far cry from Florida, but the change to a slower pace became part of Lincoln’s appeal to Frazier.

“The social life in Lincoln was, to be truthful, kind of boring at first,” Frazier said. “You have to understand, I was from Florida and lived around big towns. But you adjust to the differences, and then you become fond of Lincoln in a hurry. I’m still adjusting to it socially. The country-like atmosphere took some getting used to. Again, it was something that I not only grew comfortable with, but came to really enjoy. It’s one of the things that keeps me here.”

Most—but not all—of the people in Lincoln welcome the out-of-state Huskers.

“Especially for minority student-athletes, the change in culture is more severe,” Frazier said. “Football players are taunted. I was

taunted, especially at first, but I never responded to it. I knew that taunting was a sign of ignorance, so I didn't pay attention to it."

On the personal side, Frazier had no complaints, claiming the Midwestern culture itself is appealing to him.

"You find the work ethic and the truthfulness that Nebraska is known for," Frazier said.

As the summer of 1998 approached, Frazier marveled that he was still in Lincoln, a scenario he never would have envisioned as a freshman in 1992.

"I didn't know I would still be here at this point," Frazier said. "But I like this place and always will like Lincoln. If something else comes up, who knows? If I do stay here for a long time, it will be because this is such a great place to raise a family. It's relatively slow. It does have a little crime, but nothing compared to where I am from, or to other cities the size of Lincoln in other states. Plus, Lincoln is a city that is growing, so there will be more and more opportunities for young people as time goes on."

Frazier has plans to one day return to Florida, a state he still refers to as home because his family resides there.

"Now, when I go home to Florida, it's different than before," Frazier said. "Sure, it's still the same place. But most of the people I grew up with are gone. And it was funny to see the ones who are still there doing the same thing they were doing when I left. It's just weird, because you change, and so does the town you grew up in. But I still plan on moving back to Florida. When will that happen? I don't know. But home is always home."

He said he is looking forward to the day when he and former high school/Nebraska teammate Tyrone Williams hang out again in Florida. Williams lives there in the off-season when he's not with his NFL team, the Green Bay Packers. Frazier is often asked about his relationship with Williams these days.

"I talked with Tyrone when I was in Florida recently," Frazier said. "People might think I'm sad that he's in the NFL and I'm not, but I'm happy for him. We always talked about how one of us would make it in the NFL. We didn't know which one of us would make

it. But I hope he plays 10 or 15 more years. I couldn't be happier for him. If it was me playing professionally, and Tyrone wasn't in the NFL, he'd be happy for me. I really do believe myself to be lucky."

During his career in Lincoln, Frazier was able to play with some of the greatest players in the history of Nebraska football.

"I played with a lot of great players," Frazier said. "Offensively, I played with some of the best in the game. On the offensive line, I played with Aaron Graham, Zach Wiegert, Will Shields, Aaron Taylor, Rob Zatechka and Brenden Stai, as well as Joel Wilks. Those guys knew their job inside and out. The receivers, Tyrone Hughes, Corey Dixon, Reggie Baul and Abdul Muhammad were all top notch. The running backs were great. They were coached by Coach Solich so they made almost no mistakes. I loved the running backs—you would never expect any mistakes out of them.

"Defensively, I was on a team that had great players. On the defensive line we had John Parrella. Christian Peter was the best at getting the team motivated. At rush end, I saw guys like Donta Jones, Trev Alberts, DeWayne Harris, Jared Tomich and Travis Hill. At linebacker, there was Ed Stewart, Darren Williams—he didn't play a lot, but he was good. The defensive backs included Tony Veland, Tyrone Williams, Kareem Moss, Barron Miles and Toby Wright. I know Michael Booker and Mike Minter ended up great, but I did not play all four years with those guys."

Frazier remembers enjoying the challenge of Saturday afternoons more than he did of the weekly practices. Simply stated, the Husker defense—the Blackshirts—was so good, that the Big Red offense was more like Lil' Red in practice; and remember, this was an offense that led the nation in rushing yards at nearly 400 yards per game. In practice, the gains were measured by feet and inches.

"The defense we had those two years was great," Frazier said. "Our offense had so many problems with them in practice. And we were a good offense, too. It's just that our defense was that great."

While Frazier shuns any praise calling him the "best quarterback" ever in Nebraska, or in college football history, he is quick to place such a label on that group of Blackshirts.

"Especially my senior year, that was a defense that was just fun for us on the offense to watch," Frazier said. "That was the best defense I ever saw—that defense my last two years at Nebraska. We knew that if we could move the ball on them in practice, we could move it—almost easily—against any of the teams we played. I would rank that group as the best defense I ever saw or knew of. And I'm not saying that just because they were on my team. I'm saying that because of what they did to opponents. Look at even the big-time, big-name teams we played and see the numbers they posted against us. Or more importantly, the numbers they DIDN'T post against us because of what our defense did to them. People talk a lot about our offense wearing down teams and grinding out the yardage, which was true. But our defense did the same thing to other teams' offenses. By the second half, you could see it in their eyes; they didn't even want to take the field and face our defense."

There was no area of the defense that had a weakness, which gave Frazier and his teammates a lot of confidence during games.

"There was so much speed, so much quickness in that group," Frazier said. "Of course, since they are Huskers, they were all very strong. But the most important thing was that everyone did their job like they were supposed to do it."

Other team's losses—which came by the dozen, in terms of yards, as several teams had no, or negative, rushing totals against the Blackshirts—were the Husker offense's gain.

"Facing them all week made the offense better," Frazier said. "Come game time, it made us go out there and perform better than we would have otherwise. After facing that group in practice, the games really were a walk in the park."

While a lot of other teams, like Colorado, built up their games against Nebraska, Frazier said the Buffs were never the Big Red's toughest test, at least during Frazier's tenure.

"The team I liked playing against the most was Kansas State," Frazier said. "They always played us hard. A lead was never safe with them because they always played us to the end. People always thought Colorado was the hardest game for us. But once we got a

lead against them, they would die. Colorado wanted it to be a huge rivalry, but they didn't hold up their end of the deal. A rivalry is where one team wins one year, and the other team wins the next year—it goes back and forth. But it was never that way with Colorado. We always beat them, and it wasn't always that close. Our defensive coordinator, Charlie McBride, does a great job with the defense. He always had so much heat on Colorado's quarterback."

Still, going to Boulder was never fun.

"I never liked playing at Colorado," Frazier said. "They had a 'wet' stadium—meaning they sold beer. And the bench was so close to the stands that once we had them down, they'd dump beer on us. When it snowed, they would hit us with snowballs. It was definitely a hostile environment—at least from the stands, because it was not that hard on the field."

While Frazier never took Colorado seriously as a rival, the Buffs did leave at least one mark on Frazier.

"The hardest hit I ever took was from Chad Brown against Colorado my freshman year," Frazier said in reference to the current All-Pro Seattle Seahawks linebacker. "It was the second play after they turned the ball over. Chad hit me on the sideline, and that was the first time I ever felt a hit. He had quick feet for a big guy."

The games with UCLA, especially the 14-13 win in 1994 that Frazier believed was the biggest victory of the first national championship season, were always exciting.

"UCLA was a well-coached team," Frazier said. "Terry Donahue was a good coach. We still talk when I see him. I saw him at the 1998 Orange Bowl. He is always very sincere, and I respect that."

Ironically, the games Frazier enjoyed the most were the ones that were the closest. He held little fondness for hanging 50 points on a team or winning by four touchdowns.

"The games I liked the best were the ones where teams made us play all out for four quarters—the Washington State game my senior year, the games with Kansas State and UCLA," Frazier said. "The blowout games were not much fun. If we were up by 30 at halftime, I didn't feel like we even had to be out there any more."

One man who made a lasting mark on Frazier was late Nebraska coach Bob Devaney.

"I really liked Bob Devaney," Frazier said. "He was always outgoing and had a smile on his face. I still remember the day he told me that I was the best quarterback he ever saw play the game. Coming from him, that meant a lot. When he died, it really affected me because I had been talking to him more and more the longer I was here."

Frazier said Devaney and Osborne built the tradition in Lincoln, and a part of the success is the walk-on program where primarily in-state players are invited, at their own expense, to try out for the team. Likewise, Frazier said the entire Nebraska coaching staff is special.

"A lot of the success of Nebraska's program is from the walk-on program you hear so much about," Frazier said. "It gives NU a lot to work with in practice. The system that Nebraska has is first-rate. They prepare the players. We know that our third and fourth team is as good, or better than, most teams' first unit. The coaches are the best. They all have unique personalities. They always had us ready to go out there and run the system the way it was supposed to be run. You can have all the talent in the world, but if it is not coached properly, you won't make it to the next level. Look at Florida State, they always have tons of talent. And they have won only one national championship."

A big deal was made of the "Day in the Life" video put together about a single day of Nebraska football. The day used was what turned out to be Coach Osborne's 250th victory against Oklahoma on Nov. 1, 1997. In the locker room Coach Osborne was caught on tape saying that he had visited Frazier the day before when Frazier had developed yet another blood clot.

"I had no problem with that being left in the video—it sends a message," Frazier said. "The day before that game, Coach Osborne did come up and talk to me. After they filmed the video, they asked me if I had any problem with that being left in the project. It comes during part of his speech where Coach Osborne is telling the players

not to take football for granted. It is important that players, especially at the college level, hear that."

Finally, how long will Frazier stay in Lincoln? Will he raise his family in Lincoln? Will he one day retire in Nebraska?

"It's hard to say because so much can happen," Frazier said. "But I love the people, and the state has been good to me. I miss my family. My mother told me when I left high school for Nebraska that I had to stick it out. Now she often says she wants me to move home. Once you are gone for a while, it is different. There is not much for me back there, except family. But it is very nice to visit.

"You know, wherever I go—wherever I am—I am always going to be a Nebraskan. A part of me grew here into a man. I learned so much about life, about the things that are the most important to me. I got a good education, and I got my priorities in order. I can't imagine my life without Nebraska."

15 KEYS TO SUCCESS FROM NO. 15

1 Be honest: "You are only as good as your word. If people cannot trust you, then they will have a hard time respecting you, regardless of what you accomplish. There are times when it might seem like lying will give you the easy way out of something. Just the opposite is true: The lie, no matter how big or small, will almost always make the road that much harder."

2 Work hard: "To go from point A to point Z, you can't just jump to L and then hop to the end. For the things that hold true meaning in your life, shortcuts are a road to no-man's land. This means going all out, 100-percent in the classroom and on the football field. In life, 99.9 percent of the world has to work for what it gets. Even if you believe yourself to be in the .1 percent born with a silver spoon in your mouth, you will still have to sweat and, at times, burn the midnight oil to stay ahead of the pack. Pay attention in school and do your homework. Remember that school is a cumulative process, so how you go about your work today will affect you tomorrow and in the future."

3 Stay focused and concentrate: "This is where the struggle comes in for a lot of kids today. They can't stay focused on one thing because they want to do something else, and they can't concentrate because their mind is elsewhere. I have seen where children today want to watch television while they eat dinner. If you do that, you will have no meaningful conversation with your family during the meal. I have seen kids who can't finish a task because they are no longer interested. If you have focus and concentrate, you will actually lessen the amount of time you need to spend completing most projects."

4 Make the most of what you do well: “Just because you do something well doesn’t mean you need to work on that particular thing less. If you want to play college football and you are a fast runner, don’t quit running just to concentrate on weightlifting. Don’t get me wrong, weightlifting can be a great help, and you should, under proper supervision, work out with weights. But keep running, too. It is what got you where you are, and a significant loss of speed could jeopardize your goal of playing in college, even if you get really big and strong. Improve your weaknesses. But don’t let your strengths become weaknesses.”

5 Leave no stone unturned: “When you have to make a big decision, involve everyone you love or respect in the process. You might not use all the information and feedback they provide, but the input you get could have a big influence in your decision. Choose to have an open enough mind to let others give you their opinion. The advice is free, and it can save you a lot of heartache and prevent regrets down the line.”

6 Respect parents, teachers and coaches: “The trend today seems to be for young people to blame coaches if the player doesn’t play well, the teacher if the student gets a bad grade, and the parent if a kid makes a mistake. Adults have spent more time in life than kids, and they have, therefore, endured a lot more in life. They did not get where they are by taking the easy way out. Just like young people, parents, teachers and coaches need support. It works against you when you disrespect the older people in your life.”

7 Learn from everyone: “Some of my best friends were role players, or reserves, on my football teams. But they had something to add just as I did. From their perspective you can gain insights that someone in your position won’t notice. You can learn something from anyone you meet or know. Don’t let a valuable resource go untapped.”

8. Make a well-thought-out decision and don't look back: "You hear about how everything looks better in hindsight, but you really can't turn back the hands of time. When you have to make a decision, make it the best you can and move on. While it is important to learn from your past, stay focused on the future. Thinking about what might have been will serve no purpose. Applying what you learn while looking forward will keep you moving in the right direction."

9. Don't judge others: "Sometimes, you will hear second-hand information about people you know or don't know. The information might be inaccurate or taken out of context. Even if the information you hear is true, don't condemn other people for making mistakes. We all make them in life. If you support your friends, you can help them work through their problems. And when you make a mistake or need friends for support, they will be there for you, too, because you were there for them during a tough period in their lives."

10. Keep commitments: "I talked about this already in the book: When I said I would visit Nebraska, I had to keep my word. I was tired after visiting four other colleges and didn't want to go visit Nebraska. I figured the four colleges I was looking at provided a good enough selection of choices. But I had made a commitment to Nebraska that I would visit. To not visit would have been to contradict what I said I would do. Because the people around me insisted I keep my commitment, look how it worked out and what I was able to accomplish."

11. Stay in shape: "When the off-season for your sport rolls around, don't take time completely off. Either find another sport that will keep your mental skills sharp and keep you in shape, or take up a conditioning program. Some athletes get so far out of shape in the off-season that they are still getting back into top shape well after the season has started. If you do that, you are hurting your

team. Consult a trainer or doctor and stay in good shape year-round. It will allow you to continue to improve when your sport begins practice again because you will already be in shape and can move forward in your skills development as soon as practice starts."

12 Be sure to make every day count: "Because of what I have been through, I know that today could be my last day. I am thankful for every day that I have. In this day and age especially, we all think we have it tough and everyone is always claiming to be stressed out. People worry about tomorrow—I just hope I get to tomorrow each day. Life is a gift, and you should be thankful for, and enjoy, each day of your life."

13 Work on complete development as a person: "Even if you are a great athlete, you will need something to do at some point in your life. If you have an interest in music or drama, don't forget about going after it just because you don't see other athletes involved in it. You will meet people you otherwise might not have met. Work on developing your spiritual side, wherever your faith may be. You should not have to be down in the dumps before you meditate or develop your faith. If your faith is there, it will always be there as long as you nurture it and continue to help it grow. Developing your faith will also give you more peace of mind."

14 Sacrifice: "Sometimes the biggest impact you can have is giving of yourself for the good of everyone else around you. Sacrifice is a big part of success for anyone. It can mean doing a few extra laps when you know you have a ways to go to get back in shape. It can mean handing the ball off because a defense is giving you a particular look that would preclude you from running the ball yourself. A sacrifice can make everyone—including you—better off in both the short run and the long run. It takes looking deep inside yourself and discarding selfish thoughts. Especially in team sports, don't be an individual because no matter how good you are, you will not win without the help and sacrifice of your teammates."

15. Put children first: “One thing I committed myself to is being a positive influence on children. The few minutes they ask of you are almost nothing to you. But to a child, a few words from someone they look up to is gold. Don’t make it be their fool’s gold. Anyone in a position to make a positive difference in a child’s life should consider it their privilege to do so. To do anything less is to cheat a child—and yourself in the process. Remember how much it meant to you when someone you looked up to gave you some guidance or advice—or even just listened to you—when you were younger. Those are times a child never forgets.”

Frazier’s Honors

- 1996 Degree in Communication Studies, University of Nebraska
- 1995 First-Team All-American (Football Writers, Walter Camp, Associated Press, AFCA, UPI, *American Football Quarterly*, College Sports, All-American Foundation)
- 1995 Heisman Trophy Runner-up
- 1995 Johnny Unitas Golden Arm Award Winner
- 1995 UPI Player of the Year
- 1995 *Sporting News* Player of the Year
- 1995 Sullivan Award Finalist (Amateur Athlete of the Year)
- 1995 Davey O’Brien Quarterback Award Finalist
- 1995 Red Blaik Leadership Award (All-American Football Foundation)
- 1995 TD Club of Columbus Quarterback of the Year
- 1995 *Football News* Offensive Player of the Year Finalist
- 1995 ESPY Player of the Year Finalist
- 1995 U.S. Sports Academy January Amateur Male Athlete of the Month
- 1995 First Team All-Big Eight (Associated Press, Big Eight Coaches)
- 1995 Big Eight Offensive Player of the Year (AP, Coaches)
- 1995 Tom Novak Award Winner
- 1994, 1995, 1996 Bowl Most Valuable Player
- 1993 Davey O’Brien Quarterback Award Semifinalist
- 1993 Second Team All-Big Eight (AP, Coaches)
- 1992 Big Eight Freshman/Newcomer of the Year (Coaches, AP)
- 1992 Coca-Cola Bowl MVP

Significant Career Accomplishments

- Led the Huskers to three straight perfect regular seasons in 1993, 1994 and 1995, and was the bowl MVP three times, leading NU to two fourth-quarter TDs against Miami in 1995 and to NU's second national title in 1996
- Second in career rushing at Nebraska among quarterbacks and 19th overall with 1,955 yards and 36 TDs (third all time in touchdowns)
- Tied for fourth on NU scoring charts with 222 points in 35 games (6.3 points per game)
- Gained record for total offense yards with 5,476
- Ranks third in career passing with 3,521 yards and is first in passing TDs, with 43
- Holds school record with 79 total offensive touchdowns in his career (43 rushing, 36 passing)
- First true freshman quarterback to start for a Tom Osborne-coached Nebraska team



BOB SCHALLER

was the sports editor of the *Scottsbluff Star-Herald* from 1991 to 1997. He covered the Huskers' back-to-back national championships in 1994 and 1995 and was a Heisman Trophy voter in 1996. A Colorado native and self-confessed "born-again Nebraskan," Schaller won several writing awards in Scottsbluff, including Nebraska Press Association Columnist of the Year, Story of the Year and was recognized nationally by the Associated Press Sports Editors for enterprise writing. Schaller has written several other books, including the life story of Green Bay Packers wide receiver Don Beebe, *More than a Ring* and *I Played for Coach Osborne*.

"I believe Bob Schaller does an excellent job of accurately portraying Tommie's nature, his personality and those things that made him a great player and an outstanding person as well. It was refreshing to see Bob examine Tommie and his playing career through the eyes of many different people who knew him well, and I believe the result is a very accurate portrayal of not only Tommie, but also the events that occurred here at the University of Nebraska during the years that he played for us."

Tom Osborne, University of Nebraska

"Tommie was the perfect quarterback to run Coach Tom Osborne's offense. All of the skills that you need to run that offense, you could find in Tommie Frazier. Coach Osborne needed someone who was fast laterally and could think quickly on his feet, making the right decisions in traffic. To me, that was Tommie."

Steve Spurrier, University of Florida



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